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With the Author's kind regards

to W. Wes

JOHN ARMSTRONG

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Figure 1 is a 2D scatter plot representing the distribution of 1000 simulated data points. The horizontal and vertical axes both range from 0 to 1000, with major tick marks every 200 units. The data points are represented by small black dots. They are distributed across the entire plot area, but there is a noticeable concentration or higher density of points in the upper right quadrant, specifically between x=600-800 and y=600-800. Other points are more sparsely distributed in the lower left and middle regions.

to visit
Napoli

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JOHN ARMSTRONG

CHAPTER I

THE THREE FRIENDS

‘O day and night, but this is wondrous strange,
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.’

It was a November evening in the year of grace 18—, and our story opens in the cathedral city of Norwich.

In the house surgeon’s room in the County Hospital, three young men are seated round the fire engaged in an animated conversation.

As these personages have a good deal to do with our story, I will introduce them in detail to the reader.

Sitting in his easy chair, and bending forward in an attitude of attention, with his pipe in his hand, John Armstrong, house surgeon of the Norwich Hospital, first deserves our attention.

He is about twenty-six, of ruddy complexion, with light hair and moustache; well built, standing in his shoes about five feet nine inches, and quite up to the average in weight and general development.

He was well read as a student, and had taken an interest in matters not generally studied by the medical

aspirant, or to no greater extent than his professional examination required.

But although John Armstrong had largely devoted his spare time to studies outside his profession, he was yet proficient in all its branches, having gained some of the highest distinctions both in medicine and surgery.

He had held several public appointments, and was shortly about to terminate his present office and join his father in practice, who wished him to settle down where he and his father before him had always been doctors, and to carry to another generation the reputation of the family. Indeed, he hoped from the special talent of this member of the race that a new era was about to dawn in the north country, and that the professional skill of his ancestors was about to be more than eclipsed by this latest offshoot of the stock.

Such views were not altogether shared by the son. Much as he respected, indeed loved, the old home and all the memories associated with it, the routine of a quiet country practice did not satisfy him. He had no burning desire to distinguish himself, but he wanted a much larger scope than he saw there, and he felt that he possessed a mind that required a bigger field than a north country village could afford; and, in short, though he did not see how at present he could avoid the prospect sketched out by his father, he had yet made up his mind that if the opportunity presented he would seek out a fresh field for the active work of his life.

He felt chiefly attracted to the great metropolis, where the leaders of his profession lived and taught, and where most of the scientific questions of the day were debated; there he thought he might find a worthy arena, and it was in this direction that his eyes were frequently turned.

He had one sister, who, since the death of their mother, kept house for their father in the old home.

The second of the three, who was sitting opposite the last, was a somewhat older man, of dark complexion, with clean shaven face, and in clerical attire. He was deep in an argument with Dr Armstrong, who was a friend of some years standing, and was expounding his views with considerable warmth and fluency.

James Paget—for such was his name—was a priest of the English Church, and curate of a neighbouring parish; being also a friend of the hospital chaplain, he at times assisted him in his spiritual duties.

He was a member of a county family, and had very aristocratic relations. He was highly educated, an Oxford graduate, and his tenets, as might be expected from the school in which he had been trained, were distinctly High Church without being too ritualistic. He claimed, however, to be ultra-liberal, and rather liked than otherwise to argue with an atheist; and he was without holy horror of a divergence from orthodox opinion; and although he honestly and devoutly believed in his religion, he was not always ready to devote to everlasting destruction every opponent he did not succeed in overcoming by argument.

The remaining member of the trio was somewhat sallow complexioned; in build he was spare, and not too well developed, and, although enjoying good health usually, gave an observer the idea of physical weakness.

There was a peculiar sharpness about his eyes, which were deeply set, and his expression would often deceive a careless eye, for he was very observant, and frequently allowed nothing to escape him, when he appeared to be giving little attention to the subject in hand.

He was twenty-five, a solicitor by profession, and at the present time taking a holiday in Norwich, where his family resided; but he was shortly about to commence

housekeeping in London, where a share in a practice had been recently acquired for him by his father, who was one of the surgeons to the County hospital.

The latter had been in his youth a fellow student with John Armstrong's father at Guy's, and the intimacy begun in those days had never been allowed to lapse ; so that in the course of time Charles Dawson, the son of the Norwich surgeon, became the intimate friend of John Armstrong the younger, and later, the accepted suitor of his sister Alice. Now the London practice was purchased, it only remained for Charles Dawson to settle down into his new business, put his house in order, and bring home the bride.

Charles Dawson was sitting between the other two with one of his elbows resting on the table, smoking a cigar, and while apparently not paying much heed to the conversation, was taking careful note of it.

'You say, then,' said the clergyman, 'that Science knows nothing of miracles? Do you mean to contend that all Revelation in this respect is untrue? Some of you medicos, I know, are sceptical in everything, and, as in your own case, I find it is often difficult in the extreme to ascertain what it is you really do believe ; but I don't think you are quite an infidel. Science, I admit, has made in this age giant strides, but, my good fellow, none the less, "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy."'

'Don't mistake me, Paget,' said the other, 'when I said Science knows nothing of miracles, I did not say—though some great thinkers do—that Science proves them to be impossible. You have repeatedly told me that a necessary element in the appreciation of miracles is faith, and faith and science are somewhat antagonistic principles. We medicos really know so little about miracles that we feel quite incapable of discussing them,

and we leave such matters to you clerics, who appear to be so much better informed on the subject. I must say, however, when you approach this question, you seem to have a somewhat mixed idea as to what is, and what is not evidence. Much as I may respect the truths of Revelation, when you say they are proved by unimpeachable evidence, unless you consider faith and evidence to be the same thing, I fail to follow you. Come, Dawson, gather your wandering thoughts, and give the court the value of your legal acumen! In the great case *Science v. Miracles*, what do you think of the defendant's evidence?'

'Really, my good fellows, you must not drag me into this argument,' said Dawson, taking his cigar out of his mouth after one or two vigorous whiffs, and gazing fixedly into the fire. 'I know nothing about the matter, and in such a case as Armstrong has propounded, I fail to see how any costs could possibly be recovered, so *de minimis non curat lex*. I must say, however, Armstrong, I consider your behaviour unprofessional. What would you say if Paget were to dispute your dictum as to a medical point; or what should I say if my law were impugned? Yet here is that exemplary personage calmly allowing you to suggest doubts, and actually arguing with you about them, touching the very foundation of principles, which in this realm of England he is specially empowered to teach by Act of Parliament. If this is allowed to continue, it seems to me that order itself is threatened.'

'There, Paget, now go for him,' said the previous speaker, 'and give him some of your eloquence! Did you ever hear anything so sordid? That's the character of our lawyers all over. Mark you, they never trouble about the scientific bearing of anything, where no costs

are to be got. Costs—costs—costs! They're all you think about!'

'Good again, old man,' retorted Dawson, 'who ever heard of doctors' looking after their fees! Come, Paget, give us your ecclesiastical opinion as to who are keener after their fees—doctors or lawyers?'

'No, no, it's too bad,' said the curate. 'This is the way you always behave, whether lawyers or doctors, when beaten in argument. You go off on some side issue! Speaking of evidence, you can have different kinds.'

'Indeed you can,' interrupted Dawson; 'don't you remember old Dr Simpson, when asked by the Norwich county court judge the other day what evidence he had to show that Farmer Rumbal was able to pay his bill; replied that he had very good evidence, and when challenged to give it, said that his coachman told him that he had heard his—the coachman's—mother-in-law say that she knew, as a fact, old Rumbal had a banking account at the London and Provincial Bank. The old man felt quite insulted when his honour told him he was surprised to find an educated man so ignorant of the nature of evidence.'

'Now, Dawson,' said Armstrong, 'just leave the Profession alone, can't you! But really, Paget, dropping for a moment the subject of miracles, your last apt quotation from the immortal bard is very much to the purpose; there *are* more things in heaven and earth than we poor mortals dream of, or can explain by any scientific reasoning. We often see phenomena, which we don't understand, although we give them big sounding names—phenomena which in their way are sometimes as hard to explain as miracles. Now, here's a queer case. About a fortnight ago a patient named Gibbs, was admitted into the hospital, whose

history was briefly as follows :—He is a man of about forty-five years of age, a clerk in a wholesale firm in the town, and he was sent here by his employers, who found him one morning lying down on the floor of the office in a sort of stupor. At first they thought he had been drinking, as he could give no account of himself. He seems to have been writing at a desk, then suddenly to have fainted, and fallen off his chair on to the floor. His previous history quite refuted the drink theory, and on his coming here I elicited the fact that some years ago he had a similar attack, which, however, soon passed off and did not recur. I found also unmistakable evidence of chronic heart disease, but after the most careful physical examination, and the closest scrutiny of all his symptoms, I failed entirely to formulate in my own mind sufficient reason for the condition he is now reduced to. For although I may tell you the attack has shown no tendency to return, while in the hospital, my patient's general state is a most lamentable one. He appears to have lost heart, and says he is going to die, and has even mentioned the day, which is about a week hence. There is no good combating this idea ; he is quite sure, and has given directions as to the settlement of a few of his affairs after death. When I asked him why he had fixed on a certain day, he shook his head, and said he was not quite sure, but he knew he would never go back to work again. His wife is greatly troubled, and comes to me about it. She is very nervous, and I don't know what to tell her. There is nothing in the man's condition warranting any immediately fatal issue beyond the peculiar gloomy character of his thoughts. I particularly asked Dr Barrett, our senior physician, and your father, Charley, to see him ; and although they were a little struck by the unnatural

persistency with which he repeated his belief, they both came to the conclusion, after a careful examination, that his views partook more of the nature of a delusion. Now, what I want to know is, are these gloomy ideas any evidence of a crisis in his present condition? If he were to die, would you call it only a coincidence? I remember another case on the same lines. There I thought it *was* a coincidence, but now I'm in doubt, and am very carefully watching what will happen.'

'But,' said Dawson, throwing the end of his cigar into the fire, 'don't you find patients telling you they are going to die, who fail to keep their word? I have frequently heard the governor say one pet patient of his is always dying—whenever she sends for him—though I believe he is very glad the old lady does mistake her condition, for otherwise he would be a good many fees out of pocket.'

'That's another sort of case altogether, Charley,' replied the other, 'and doctors have many such cases to deal with each year. There is this distinction, which is quite enough to differentiate them. My patient suffers from undoubted organic disease; the kind you refer to rarely, if ever, do. I well remember the words of an old hospital teacher, "If a patient suffering from organic disease of a serious nature ever tells you he is going to die, do not be in too great a hurry to disbelieve him."'

Paget, who had been listening intently and evincing great interest, here asked whether any clergyman had seen this poor patient, that the question was one of great importance from a spiritual point of view.

'My dear fellow, you are right,' said Armstrong; 'there again I have been puzzled as to the proper course to pursue. The patient is a Roman Catholic, and only yesterday his priest came, and told me he had been requested to administer the last rites of the

Church, and that he was doubtful as to his duty under the circumstances. Did I think the man was so near death as he purported to be ?'

'What did you tell him ?' eagerly asked the curate.

'I told him that I could take no responsibility, that the patient suffered from heart disease, and therefore, as was well known, might die very rapidly, but that up to the present I had seen no symptoms indicating so rapid a termination of his illness.'

'What did he do ?' said Paget. 'Did he comply with your patient's wishes ?'

'After much doubt, and, I believe, after having consulted with an ecclesiastical superior, he decided to do so.'

'Quite right. I should have done the same. Yes, I should have done the same,' said the curate.

'But,' said Dawson, fixing his eyes on Dr Armstrong, 'don't you think, John, that, supposing a patient were in so critical a condition, the prayers for the dying, with all the paraphernalia of the Romish Church, would be more likely to accelerate than to ward off a fatal termination ?'

'Your question is a poser, Charley, I must confess,' said the other. 'Strictly, according to the teaching of Science, the excitement likely to be produced by the ceremony would rather tend to physical harm. But, then, supposing the man be in the condition he imagines himself ; supposing he attribute to this religious ceremony the importance, which there can be no doubt many do, it is no light responsibility to take on oneself the onus of opposing such rites.'

'He ought to be *anathema* 'who would do so,' sternly ejaculated Paget. 'What ! in that supreme inoment, when the poor wretch knows he is about to approach his Maker, when he feels to the full the fearful weight of his earthly transgressions, and eagerly asks for the one

last chance of disburdening himself, then to throw obstacles in his way! No, Armstrong is not that sort of man.'

'But that is the question,' said Dawson, 'does he, or can he know?'

Just at this moment with a hurried knock at the door, a nurse burst into the room. 'Oh, Dr Armstrong, Sister says, will you come at once to the patient Gibbs, in Paston Ward, for she thinks he's dying!'

In an instant Dr Armstrong had flung down his pipe, and was hurrying to the wards, followed by the nurse, leaving the other two fairly startled by the episode.

'It does look as if he's bad,' said Paget.

'Don't you think Armstrong will find him dead?' replied Dawson. 'I saw from the look of the nurse that something had happened.'

'I'm glad the poor fellow saw the priest yesterday,' said the clergyman. 'It would have been indeed a tragedy, if it had been in any way prevented.'

Dawson made no remark, but pointed out it was getting late, that the event would probably occupy all the spare time of their friend that evening, and that it was time to depart.

Paget agreed; so, taking up their hats, the two friends left the room, walked down the corridor, and silently left the hospital.

CHAPTER II

THE NURSE AND HER SISTER

'Tell me where is fancy bred,
In the heart, or in the head?'

WHEN Dr Armstrong reached the ward, he saw at a glance that all was over. A screen had been drawn round the bed, and the Sister was standing by the bedside.

'It was all in a second,' she said, as he approached. 'A nurse came for me, and when I got here he was dead. He kept asking to get up about an hour ago, and indeed in spite of being told that he could not, I thought he would make the attempt, and put a nurse specially on duty to watch him. She says that just before she called me, the patient raised himself upon his elbows in bed, gave a kind of cry, and one or two gasps, then fell back dead.'

'I don't see what more could have been done to help him, Sister,' said the surgeon. 'It's very extraordinary, but I don't feel altogether surprised. I half expected it.'

'You would like to see his wife, when she comes, wouldn't you, sir? Shall I send her to your room?'

'Yes—do—'

Dr Armstrong then took a lamp from a nurse, and gazed steadily on the dead man. His face was quite

calm ; there was no trace of a death struggle : indeed, the look was more one of composure, and to the eyes of the doctor almost seemed to rebuke him for his doubt as to his patient's foreknowledge of the end. The white, impassive features seemed to say, 'I told you so. Now, look at me. Is not this death ?'

The surgeon bent reverentially over the body, looked carefully at the widely-dilated pupils, gently raised the hands, and felt at the wrists for the now motionless pulse. He did it mechanically, not for a moment thinking there might be a mistake, for when the nurse had appeared at the door of the sitting-room, he knew his patient was dead, and he seemed to think he had never doubted the man's words.

He slowly left the ward and took his way to his room, which had been deserted by his friends. He sat down in his chair and looked into the fire.

'I wonder,' he mused to himself, 'if I shall know like this man when I am to die? How came he to know? The man who died in B ward the week before last had almost an identical condition. He died suddenly, but he certainly had no foreknowledge. What is it that makes the difference? I know what I shall find when I dissect his heart ; I shall be able to put my finger on the precise disease, and trace its effect throughout the body. But shall I be able to find anything in his brain to afford a clue to this wonderful foresight of his? Will any pathologist ever be able to do so? Did the man make a strange guess?'

So he ruminated, pondering over the recent event, wondering whether it could be made to throw light on the general mystery of life.

At this moment the clock struck ten, and the gate porter knocked at his door, bringing two letters. After handing them to him, the man said, 'If you don't mind,

sir, nurse Elliot's sister, who is just leaving the hospital, wants very much to see you. I told her it was getting late, but Miss Mary said she was sure you would see her.

'All right, Bradford, send her in,' was the reply.

'What does Mary Elliot want,' thought the doctor as the porter went out; 'I noticed she was spending the evening here with her sister.'

In another minute his door was thrown open, and two young women came demurely into the apartment. The elder was about twenty-six, dressed in full nurse's costume, and seemed to be impelled chiefly by the younger on the present mission, for she looked as if she were aware she was taking a great liberty, and was not sure how the house surgeon would like it.

Closely following, and urging her on, came the younger, a beautiful girl of twenty-two, who, although she would not have had the courage to have faced the doctor alone, now, with her sister, felt bold enough for anything. Advancing in front she exclaimed, 'Oh, Dr Armstrong, my sister is the silliest creature imaginable! She says that we have no business to come and see you at this time of night, and that she does not know what the matron would say, if she came to know of it.'

'Don't talk such nonsense, Mary,' said her sister, 'just tell Dr Armstrong what it is you want, and save his time.'

'Sit down, nurse. Take a chair, Miss Mary,' said the surgeon. 'Never mind what the matron would say.'

'How can I be of any service? I'm sure I shall be most happy.'

'There, Emily, didn't I say so?' said the younger. 'I knew Dr Armstrong would help us.'

'But you haven't yet told him what you want,' said her sister.

‘Dr Armstrong, we are going to have such a treat on Thursday! There’s to be an excursion down the Yare to Yarmouth in a steamer. All the teachers of St Margaret’s School are going, and my sister too, and several other friends. Mr Paget will conduct the party, and he told me I might ask you to come. He felt sure you would help, and would tell us a lot about many things we should see. We’re to stop specially at Burgh Castle to see some old encampment, where the Romans once lived. Then we shall have a splendid time at Yarmouth, and a Service all to ourselves at the church which, Mr Paget says, is better than many cathedrals. You will come, won’t you?’

The last sentence was said so pointedly, and the speaker looked so pretty, as she gazed entreatingly on the doctor, that without giving much thought to the matter, he replied gaily—

‘Go? Why, of course I’ll go! I’m much obliged to Mr Paget for thinking of me. Miss Mary, you are sufficient attraction alone without considering the many other delightful things we shall see and do. What time do we start?’

The girl blushed at the compliment, but the elder sister replied,—

‘Don’t quite turn her head, Dr Armstrong, Mary is already giddy enough! I’m sure we shall be glad to have you in our party, and it is kind of you to come. Mr Paget did tell us to ask you, and will be pleased to find you can. We start at 8 o’clock from the quay.’

‘You may rely on me,’ said the house surgeon; ‘and mind, Miss Mary, I shall expect you to give me your best attention. I shall consider myself your guest.’

The girl blushed, as she said with a look of real pleasure, ‘I’m so glad you are coming!’

The two sisters then departed, leaving John Armstrong once more to his thoughts.

The series of ideas that their coming had interrupted did not recur ; the face of Mary Elliot seemed to excite quite other thoughts.

He greatly admired her beauty, which he had watched developing for some time. Although it was not altogether of the most refined type, there was a freshness and innocence about it, which had repeatedly riveted his attention. He had frequently met her, when she visited her sister at the hospital, and could not help admiring her. Her sister, too, had more than once consulted him as to the health of the younger, so that a certain amount of intimacy might be said to exist between them.

The Elliots were the daughters of a small Suffolk farmer, who lived at Fritton, a few miles south-east of Norwich. He belonged to a class of English yeomen, who are, unfortunately, getting rarer every year. His family had farmed the land for generations, and although there had been a time when they had farmed much more, and when a large part of their farm had belonged to them in fee simple, yet from various causes the history of the family for a long time past had been one of decadence.

Farmer Elliot, the present representative of the family, was a thoroughly good man, and by no means an unskilful agriculturist, so that in the recent bad times he had done quite as well as his neighbours. But it must be confessed, as far as his education went, he could boast of no more than a good acquaintance with the three R's, and what general knowledge a lifetime's careful perusal of such instructive organs as the *Norwich Argus*, and the *East Anglian Gazette*, could give him. He was a sturdy upholder of the rights of his class, but, so far as his own particular interests were not adversely affected,

he had a conservative tendency, and by no means favoured the extreme radical principles of late years. Indeed, it would seem that although cut down to a few small fields, there yet lurked in him some of those feelings inherited from the Elliots of long ago, which had their origin when they were the lords of half the country round.

Farmer Elliot, however, was shrewd enough to see the value of education, and took care that his daughters should not be wanting in this respect—that is, as far as lay in his power to prevent it. But the local schools, supplemented though they might be, by a year or two at Norwich, could only give a moderate grounding in all the various subjects, which are now considered necessary to make up a good modern education: so that Emily and Mary although superior in this respect to their own class generally, could not boast of more than an average middle class education.

Their mother had been a personal friend of the matron of the Norwich Hospital, so that as Emily at an early age showed an aptitude for work of this kind, it was thought that she could not do better than enter the profession of nursing under the auspices of her mother's old friend.

Mary's tastes on the other hand had been very different, and it would be hard to say that she was fond of work of any kind. She could be useful about the house, but had very little application: though she liked to teach at the Sunday School, visit in the parish, and other occupations of this kind, which although useful, can hardly be said to be remunerative.

The pleasure she took in this work was more on account of the social intercourse it cultivated, than from any love of the work itself.

Mary was in fact something of a butterfly, and, as she

grew up, became very pretty and attractive, and like others, who have natural gifts, she thought she was entitled to make the most of hers: and although I do not say she knowingly did so—as some more designing members of her sex have been known to do—she acted instinctively with this object, and, as is well known, *ars est celare artem*, so her behaviour in proportion as it was natural was the more captivating, and was applauded by all, but the envious members of her own sex, who put her down as an ‘artful creature,’ and ‘out and out flirt.’

Mary’s parents first tried to make a governess of her, but without success. To be a governess, nowadays, means to be terribly learned, with all sorts of certificates, and above all many accomplishments. Of these Mary had the barest modicum, so that the governess scheme had to be abandoned.

Attempts were next made to find employment as a lady’s companion, but there again the lack of accomplishments stood in her way, and her good looks were rather adverse than otherwise—ladies are apt to be jealous of companions with more than their share of feminine charms.

Shortly after an opportunity occurred of getting a post of telegraph clerk at Norwich, and a year before this period Mary Elliot had entered upon her public duties, and up to the present seemed to be as satisfied with her lot as she was likely to be with anything requiring work and application.

She resided at Norwich in the house of a widow, and as she assisted at the Sunday School of St Margaret, she became acquainted with Mr Paget, and others, who took an interest in the parish work: and among them she had numerous admirers. In fact, as her sister had implied to Dr Armstrong, she had no lack of sweethearts,

and could very easily have found a suitable settlement in life had she so desired, but although guilty of a few flirtations of a harmless character, though her head may have been turned at times, she did not seem to have suffered much in her heart.

She stood in great awe of Dr Armstrong, whom she regarded as a sort of prodigy of understanding, and it was always noticed that she was more shy in his presence than at any other time. Great, too, was her pride, when he singled her out, but whether any other more ambitious idea concerning him had ever entered into her head is exceedingly doubtful, although there were not wanting among her enemies, some who asserted she had the audacity to 'set her cap at him.'

As to John Armstrong, there could be no doubt that he regarded Mary Elliot as nothing more than an acquaintance. He certainly admired her good looks, and thought she had engaging ways, but where was the harm in that? It is true that at odd times—for instance after the recent interview—he found himself thinking of her with rather more interest than he displayed towards any other member of the opposite sex; and if the truth were confessed, it was her presence that gave the chief zest to the proposed excursion, though he would probably have denied it, and considered his going an exercise of pure philanthropy.

On the other hand, the idea that he would ever marry such a person as Mary Elliot had never entered into his head, and, if it had been suggested, would have seemed to him little short of an absurdity. What possible union could there be from a mental point of view between him, the highly educated man of science with all his strange abstruse theories, and her, the little telegraph clerk, who could not have comprehended the least of them.

Yet, when two young people of opposite sexes begin to take interest in each other, no matter what the cause may be, or what may first give rise to it, who will be daring enough to say that a union little dreamt of at the beginning may not be the result, though they be separated mentally from each other to any extent?

An attraction, that cannot be comprehended by the outside world, may, as a matter of fact, be irresistible; and circumstances, which were at one time within control, may pass beyond it, and give rise to inevitable consequences; though their exact character will be different, according to the peculiarity of the individual temperament.

How great a thing it would be—what heart-burnings it would prevent, if we could only know the importance of some of our actions, which at the time seem trifling!

How often the cry—the bitter cry, ‘Had I but known!’ escapes from us long afterwards, when the course of events has brought consequences little recked of; when much as we may repent the past, we cannot alter it, and sometimes, happy shall we be, if we may escape with a temporary and retrievable loss, and not be bound to carry to our graves an evil blight brought upon us, it may be, by a single thoughtless step!

Let no man say, ‘I am so strong, I can look after myself; I can play with fire without being burnt,’ or ‘I can go without danger to the edge of the precipice.’ Pride goes before a fall, and a time may come when he will bitterly repent of his confidence.

John Armstrong sat down again in his easy chair, and relighted his pipe. Once more his thoughts reverted to the events of the day, but the vision of Mary Elliot would not cease recurring, and he found himself involuntarily thinking of the following Thursday.

After a time he rose to retire for the night, and was

opening his door, when the wife of his late patient presented herself before him.

She had just been compelled on account of the lateness of the hour to leave the bedside of her dead husband, and she was weeping bitterly.

'Oh, sir, can't I be allowed to stay by him during the night? He was so good, and has worked so hard for me! For twenty-five years before he came here he has never been away from me, and we have never had a quarrel. And now, what shall I do?' and the widow broke down utterly.

Dr Armstrong tried to comfort her; he led her to a chair, and spoke kindly. He had a wonderfully soft way with patients, and the sympathy he felt for all misfortune, he poured forth abundantly.

'Your husband,' he said, 'had everything done for him that was possible. I know how terribly distressing it is to you, and I feel for you. We doctors see much of such distress, for troubles of this kind are always taking place somewhere. It is your husband to-day; it will be some one else's husband to-morrow.'

'He told me he was going to die,' she sobbed, 'but I wouldn't believe him. Now, how I wish I had! I would never have left his side.'

'But would that have done him any good?' replied the other; 'and the long watching would have made you ill. Perhaps it is better as it is. You know he had the priest.'

The poor woman thanked the house surgeon, and when leaving, implored him not to allow any *post mortem* examination on her husband's body; and Dr Armstrong, much as he regretted it on professional grounds, good naturedly acceded to her request.

CHAPTER III

AN EMERGENCY AT THE NORWICH HOSPITAL

‘The course of true love never did run smooth.’

ON the following day John Armstrong received a letter from his father, who wrote that Alice was very anxious about Charles Dawson, a rumour having reached her that he was far from well. The letter concluded by saying that the writer particularly wanted both himself and the Dawsons to spend the Christmas, which was approaching, in the old home in the north.

As John had not heard anything about his friend being ill, later in the day he called at the house of Dr Dawson.

He found Charley in the dining-room in front of a blazing fire, reclining at his ease in a dressing-gown.

‘Why, what’s the matter?’ he said; ‘you were all right yesterday. How on earth did Alice get to know you were poorly? I have just had a letter from my father to say she is quite in a way about it.’

‘Yes,’ replied his friend, ‘I have had a letter from Alice too. It’s all the mater’s doing. Two or three days ago I had rather a troublesome cough in the night, so she immediately came to the conclusion I was in consumption, and made the governor knock my chest about, and listen through that stethoscope of his. I don’t think he heard much. He said I had bronchial catarrh—I suppose that

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means a cold. The mater must have written to your people—in fact, Alice says she did.’

‘You didn’t seem to have much of a cold yesterday,’ said John.

‘No, it was better then,’ was the reply, ‘but the very enlivening episode that occurred at your place last night didn’t do my nerves any good, and this morning I’ve got a sore throat, and am aching all over, so the mater has positively made me lie up for a few days. It’s a nuisance, too, for Paget wants me to go with him in that excursion to-morrow, and you know, the pretty Miss Elliot is going, and several other nice girls.’

‘Perhaps,’ said John, ‘Alice might not be so sorry you are laid by the heels temporarily, if she were to hear you talk so glibly of the “pretty Miss Elliot.”’

‘Rubbish!’ replied his friend, ‘Alice, I’m sure, wouldn’t mind my enjoying myself occasionally in an innocent manner. The worst of it is everything is against me. The mater ridicules the time of year as being most unsuitable—and it must be confessed November is late—but Paget has had the offer of a steam yacht for next to nothing, and he thought the offer too good to refuse, as the weather seemed to have set in so fine and mild. He has, however, made arrangements for taking the party by rail if wet, for of course they return that way. Now, Paget wants Edith to go, and I think my sister rather fancies it, and had I gone, I could have looked after her, that is, the mater would have trusted her with me, but she doesn’t seem to like to trust her with Paget. I don’t know why she should suspect the Church, but so it is. I say, old fellow, why don’t you go? The mater would trust Edith with you, and Paget said he was going to ask you, and quite forgot to do so when in your room yesterday. The argument put it out of his mind.’

'Yes,' said John, 'he did ask me, and I accepted the invitation.'

'Why, when could you have seen him?' replied Charley, with an air of astonishment. 'I know he didn't ask you yesterday, for he told me so, and he left Norwich early this morning to go to a special service at Ely Cathedral. When did you see him?'

'Well,' said John, a little nonplussed by his friend's sharpness, 'perhaps I ought to say he asked me by deputy, but *qui facit per alterum facit per se*, you know.'

'And who might have been the deputy, if I may ask?' inquired his friend.

'If you must know, the Elliots asked me: they said Paget told them to do so.'

Charley burst out laughing. 'Oh, it seems I'm not the only one who takes interest in the "pretty Miss Elliot." But I suppose you are not an engaged man. Well done, John, my boy!' and Charley again burst into a laugh.

At this moment the dining-room door opened, and two ladies entered the room. One of them was an elderly lady of some sixty years of age, who bore on her face an anxious, care-worn, expression, that betokened an invalid constitution. She had been a sufferer for years with delicate health, and her son was supposed to take after her.

The other was twenty-three, and although she looked fragile, Edith Dawson as a rule enjoyed excellent health. She was certainly beautiful, and well proportioned, but her beauty was of a very different order to that of the 'pretty Miss Elliot,' and one of Edith's chief attractions was her highly refined cast of features. Intellect formed the principal charm of her beauty, while there was more than an average deficiency of that voluptuousness, which was one of Mary Elliot's chief attractions.

Yet was she truly womanly, and her mother confessed that in her worst paroxysms never could any nurse be found equal to her own daughter in delicacy of touch, or sympathy of action ; and her father had at times playfully observed that people would think she had gone through a curriculum of nursing at his hospital, so skilful was she in the general management of the sick room.

Her education, too, had been of a thorough character ; in addition to being a consummate musician, she had more than an ordinary grounding in modern science, and John had on many occasions found her a by-no-means-to-be-despised antagonist in a scientific argument.

John Armstrong and Edith Dawson had known each other all their lives. Owing to the intimacy of their parents they had been thrown not a little together, and had grown up like brother and sister. When Charles Dawson fell in love with, and gained the affection of, John's sister, the parents on both sides had hoped that Edith and John would follow their example, so that the families might be still more closely drawn together.

Edith was an especial favourite of the elder Dr Armstrong, and to see his son united to her had been for years one of the dreams of the old man.

Apparently according to the fitness of things, this result ought in some way or other to have come about, but is it not in the experience of every one that this is frequently not the case? Indeed, it is more than questionable whether what actually does occur is not generally the reverse, and that we find fixed as consummated facts more often what ought not to be than the contrary.

Be this, however, as it may, although John had grown up from his earliest youth in close association with Edith, he had hitherto regarded her with no other feelings than those of the warmest friendship. He well recognised her great qualities, that her merits were of a sterling char-

acter, and that her education fitted her to be the life companion of any man, however intellectual. Still—strange though it may seem—he had never thought of her as his wife.

It is true that up to this time the idea of wife, and all that it brings with it to the mature man of healthy mind and healthy body had not presented itself to him: and he had scarcely considered what kind of wife he would choose, if called upon to do so. And, although repeatedly chaffed on the subject by friends—especially by his brother-in-law that was to be—he had paid little heed, finding at present, in the mental activity in which he lived, sufficient and to spare for all his energy.

He greatly admired Edith, and respected her opinion on many subjects: he moreover regarded her as one on the same intellectual level as himself, and had certainly on many occasions found the time slip away happily in her company.

But beyond that, it could not be said this lady had in any other way disturbed the equilibrium of his thoughts.

With regard to Mary Elliot it was different. From his acquaintance with and experience of Edith's great faculties he was compelled to see the intrinsic inferiority of the other. He thoroughly recognised the fact that she, at least, was not his intellectual equal, that she could never think as he did, or take pleasure in his pleasures.

Nevertheless, with all her failings, she had an attraction which Edith Dawson with all her superiority did not possess; an attraction which at first he by no means realised, and even at the present time might have denied, had he been questioned on the subject.

To a shrewd observer who knew John intimately, there might have been physical signs, which, though then by no means capable of proving a settled passion,

would at least have afforded grounds of reasonable conjecture that sparks were being struck, which might at a no distant period give unmistakable evidence of its existence, and might doom him to a life of misery, or create for him the nearest approach to happiness, which, perhaps, life is capable of.

If the young doctor had noted his own sensations as carefully as he did those of his patients, he might have drawn important conclusions from the fact that his heart beat more quickly in Mary Elliot's presence; that whatever might be the drift of his thoughts when he met her, these thoughts invariably took another channel, however important the problems might be they were busy over. For he found himself insensibly admiring her beauty, was full of a desire to prolong the interview, and, when she had gone, was aware of a feeling of disappointment.

Edith, on the other hand, had always admired John. His depth of thought, broadness of views, and scientific attainments, had great fascination. She believed that some day he would be a great man, and watched his career with the utmost interest. The constant association with him had had its effect, and had helped to develop and stimulate an attachment, which at this time was well established; although, by reason of her mental discipline she was able to disguise it from the eyes of nearly all the world.

She had heard rumours of Dr Armstrong being fascinated by Mary Elliot, and had even, with the acuteness of love's instinct, noticed changes in his behaviour when in the presence of the latter, which made her sick at heart.

That ordinary jealousy had something to do with this might readily be admitted—for are we not all human? but I will aver that jealousy formed but a small portion

of the mental distress occasioned by the thought of a closer association in the future between John Armstrong and Mary Elliot.

It was in reality the terrible danger to her hero that dismayed her. She saw that nothing but harm could come of such an association, and that a promising career would in all likelihood be blighted—if her foreboding were correct—for she knew well that between two such opposite individuals as John and Mary there could be no true union of hearts, and any other union, what could it mean but ruin for one or both?

She was able also to gauge correctly the character of Mary Elliot. She saw she was beautiful, and that her beauty was of a kind specially attractive to men, and apt to draw attention away from the lack, or poverty, of mental attainments. She had, moreover, marked, as only women can, that the lady in question had, in a mild way, shown a tendency to 'set her cap' at the young doctor.

She did not believe Mary was really in love with John, for she had become strongly imbued with the notion—perhaps not always correct—that true love can only exist between equals. She believed Mary was chiefly attracted by the doctor's reputation, and by the expectation held by many that he would some day occupy a distinguished position.

As a matter of fact this estimation of Mary's ambition was sound, and not far from the truth. If it erred at all, it was in assuming that she was quite in earnest in endeavouring to captivate John, and it did not make sufficient allowance for Mary's natural tendency to seek for admiration, wherever she could get it: and although the idea of making so important a conquest might have been pleasing to her, she as yet felt no disposition to break

her heart on John's account, and had not by any means fallen in love with that gentleman in the sense which is usually ascribed to the catastrophe in novels.

The flow of conversation between the two young men was interrupted by the advent of Mrs Dawson and her daughter. The former hoped that her son was better, and with the usual custom of a chronic invalid dilated on the necessity of various precautions, which could not fail to be irritating to her son, who did not receive the advice altogether with the respect that the motives of the adviser warranted, but rather shortly replied,—

‘Oh, I’m all right, mother, don’t worry about me.’

Then he referred to the excursion, and pointed out that John was to be of the party, and that therefore there could be no reason why Edith should not go with the others, even if he were not there.

Edith, who had entered the room with her mother, had fancied she had caught the name of Miss Elliot in their conversation. She had distinctly heard her brother’s laugh, and as her eyes fell upon John’s face, she imagined his look indicated annoyance.

The sound of Miss Elliot’s name in such a conversation was by no means agreeable, and she consequently greeted the doctor somewhat coldly.

On hearing, however, her brother’s proposal that John should take charge of her, she could not help her face expressing pleasurable surprise. Her mother observed it, and at once fell in with the proposal, which John could not help warmly seconding, even had the arrangement displeased him, which it did not.

‘I am quite willing to trust Edith with *you*, John,’ said her mother, ‘but with no one else, if her brother is not there : although I must say it seems an odd idea for folks to go out for excursions in November, and I

can't help wondering what Mr Paget was about when he thought of such a thing.'

'Never mind the reasons, mother,' said Charley impatiently, 'the matter is settled. I'm sure Edith will enjoy herself, and John will bring her home safely.'

With these words the younger Mr Dawson abruptly closed the subject, congratulating himself on having got out of an expedition which he did not much care about, and that, too, without disappointing his sister, who, he believed, was desirous of participating in it, and he shrewdly conjectured that to the lady, John's guardianship for the occasion would be fully as acceptable as his own.

At this moment a servant opened the door and announced Mr Paget.

'What, back again already, Paget,' cried Charley. 'How did the Service at the cathedral go off?'

'Was the bishop there?' asked Mrs Dawson.

'Oh, yes,' replied the clergyman, 'everything was as it should be. I should have liked your daughter to have been present, Mrs Dawson, I feel sure she would have appreciated it. The Service was most impressive, the bishop at his best, and all the *élite* of the country were there. Many of the dons were present from Cambridge, and there was a brave show of academic splendour in the choir. The Bishops of Peterborough and Rochester assisted at the ceremony, and everything might be considered a success.'

'What kind of man is the new missionary bishop?' asked Edith.

'Dr Jackson is one of the best of men, Miss Dawson,' replied the curate. 'I believe that a better worker could nowhere be found. All who come across him praise him. He was preaching at Norwich Cathedral a

short time ago, and Dr Armstrong greatly admired his sermons.'

'Oh, yes, I remember him,' interpolated the latter, 'he is a man of great parts, who thoroughly believes in his mission.'

'We want men like him at home, and should not send them abroad: there is plenty of work for such men without running after the heathen. He seems to me too good for work of that kind.'

'There I disagree,' answered the curate warmly. 'What right have we to assume that in the eyes of the Master the souls of the heathen are of less value than those of our own people. Have not some of the greatest men of the past devoted their lives to the lowest of the low?'

'That's right, Paget,' laughed Charley, 'you always land Armstrong in an argument, and as constantly get the worst of it. Now, don't you think, Edith, Dr Jackson is a great deal too good to go and spend his days among the blackamoors?'

'I think, Charley,' said his mother sternly, 'the subject is not one for argument at all, and Mr Paget would be the last to wish to argue, Dr Jackson is very noble to sacrifice his prospects at home, and it does him great credit.'

'So he is,' eagerly exclaimed Edith, 'it is, indeed, a good and great work to engage in, and I will never believe that Dr Armstrong really thinks otherwise.'

'Ah, John, my boy,' laughed Charley, 'the Church as usual carries the ladies!'

Dr Dawson now arrived on the scene, and, after a few words of greeting had been exchanged with the new arrival, John and Mr Paget took their leave.

'By-the-bye, Armstrong,' said the other, as the two strolled away from the house, 'what do you think of my

constitution? Should I be able to keep my health in a tropical climate? I have some idea of going abroad, but it might be as well to take professional advice before deciding on the step.'

'You go abroad, Paget, why, what are you thinking about, my good fellow?' replied the surgeon. 'I hope to goodness you won't leave Norwich, for I can assure you, you are the only man here who can preach a decent sermon, and the whole town will miss you. They ought to make you a minor canon at least, if only for the superb way in which you intone the Services.'

'Well,' replied the other, 'it will be necessary to do something more than my present work before long. I was talking to the new bishop this morning, and he half persuaded me to leave England, and accompany him as his chaplain. I have known him a good many years, and I think we should get on very well together. I love the work, and should have every enthusiasm in it, and should not be afraid of a little extra risk. I don't suppose life would be as easy there as here, and there must be hardships to be borne, but I should be quite willing to encounter all this and more. My only fear is, lest I might interfere with the success of the work, if I were rashly to undertake what I have not the physical power to accomplish.'

'My dear Paget,' said the doctor, 'I admire your enthusiasm, and should be the last man in the world to discourage you, but if you ask me, professionally, what I think your physical capacity is for work of this kind, I fear my answer must be a doubtful one. In spirit you are quite equal to it, but I cannot say I think you are a man able to face extremes of climate without risk. You do not appear to have the strength to rough it in a foreign land, and might not unlikely fall a prey to tropical disease.'

'But I sincerely hope, Paget, you will think twice before you expatriate yourself. You are really without flattery, a good preacher, and I am not by any means the only one here who says so. I feel sure you can do quite as good work in England as abroad. In spite of our civilisation there is plenty of room still for Christian work in England.'

'True,' said the clergyman, 'I had once planned a very different career, but *l'homme propose Dieu dispose*.'

A cloud came over his face as his mind recalled the picture he had once fondly drawn of the coming future, and which each year seemed to become more and more unlikely.

He was a true believer in his profession, and to fight the battle of his Master with all his power, energy, and devotion, had been put before everything else.

He had the feelings of a crusader of the nineteenth century, and if his fancy tended more in the direction of rituals, priestly dogmas, and the other accompaniments of the high church spirit of the age, than after the war-like paraphernalia of the mediæval warrior, no less genuine than the zeal of the latter was the fire that burnt within, and bid fair to be the guiding impulse of his life.

Like the latter, also, he had a 'fayre ladye' enshrined in his inmost heart, for whose sympathy he sorely yearned, and he had hoped that in the future she might be his companion, and helpmate, and tread with him the path he had marked out, smoothing his way, and sustaining him, when his powers flagged, and might act as a minister of God in pointing him to his ideal.

For some time past James Paget had loved Edith Dawson with all the love his nature was capable of, and his love was such as any woman might have been proud of. Though it might be true that the young curate would never for a moment have permitted any human

passion to interfere with his sacred object ; and in that respect it was out of his power to give up his heart entirely to any woman, as may be done by those with less rigid ideas of duty, and living lives devoted to less lofty ends. Yet the love he had to offer was for that reason in some respects far superior to the other kind.

In the first place, it was more stable ; for if this higher life did in a measure detract from its intensity, it made ample amends by implanting in it a portion of the fixity of purpose, and high moral principle, that would be likely to endure, as long as the heart in which they abode. Love of this kind, too, was far more likely to be lasting, and a much stronger guarantee was given to the woman who excited it, than by any passionate promise or vow, however genuine, the outcome of superfervid emotion.

Next, this kind of love has nothing degrading in it. Whatever great object a man may purpose in his after life will not be hindered, but rather will be assisted.

There is something debasing in giving one's self up entirely to any passion, whether we call it 'love,' or by any other name, if the passion is in itself essentially selfish, and cannot be classed with those for the advancement of mankind.

With the eyes of love James Paget had observed that Edith Dawson was indifferent to him, nay, more, he had seen that she specially favoured Dr Armstrong, and his idea of leaving England was not a little due to this discovery.

So true and honest was his love, that he could not even contemplate the notion of becoming a rival, for fear that even if successful, he might injure the loved one, by depriving her of him for whom he might fail to be a substitute.

After a short pause he continued :—

‘But I may take it there is nothing in my constitution absolutely forbidding me to enter upon such a responsibility?’

‘Well, no,’ replied the other, ‘I cannot say there is; but I think that such a step ought to be very carefully considered, and I have indicated certain risks, which in my opinion you are liable to.’

They were passing the curate’s abode, and John, courteously bidding his companion adieu, and promising to meet him without fail on Thursday at the quay, here parted from him.

As he sauntered on homewards, he reflected on what he had just heard.

‘I wonder,’ he thought, ‘is this Edith’s doing? Has she turned Paget’s head? Why do the Dawsons object to him? I feel sure they do—that is, all except Charley. What does Edith think? At home I know they want Edith and me to make a match of it, and nothing would please them better. Such an event *might* come to pass,’ he mused, ‘some day,—if Paget don’t get her first. She has never seemed specially sweet on me, though I have thought Paget has looked on me as the stumbling-block in his path.’

So ran his thoughts; but John, excellent physician though he might be, was but a tyro compared with the curate in gauging the heart of Edith.

It is true the latter was in love, and love notoriously adds greatly to the power of the wits in investigating the recesses of the fair one’s heart, so that here he had an advantage.

But, apart from this, James Paget had a power not possessed by the other of seeing more clearly into the mind and thoughts of others. Whether it was of natural origin, and born with him, or whether the outcome of the ardour with which he had followed his special

vocation, it is not easy to determine ; but probably not a little of his pulpit eloquence was due to it. John Armstrong's own heart had been the subject of investigation on the part of the curate, who had seen that at present it was by no means given up to the object of his passion ; but while to an ardent lover such a fact would scarcely cause disappointment, to James Paget it was far from being satisfactory.

If it were fated he could not be blest with so great a treasure, why should not this happiness fall to the lot of the young doctor—his friend too—whose intelligence was of so high an order ? Surely, he thought, this ought to be a source of satisfaction.

In a true Christian spirit he tried to think so, and ascribed to the old Adam and natural jealousy, the feeling of disapprobation which rose up in his mind, whenever he pictured Dr Armstrong as the husband of Edith. The doctor's mind was a puzzle to him : the more he probed it, the more he shrank from a certain substratum, which he thought he found there. There was a cynicism and flippancy with regard to moral principle, which were most repugnant to his nature, and against which he had often inveighed in the course of his arguments.

Although such points did not seem material to an observer like Charley Dawson, to James Paget they were all-important, when estimating the calibre of the man to whom might be indissolubly linked the lady of his heart.

The clock was striking six as John entered the hospital. He was immediately accosted by a nurse, who said he was urgently wanted in one of the wards, to see a patient, who had been admitted half-an-hour before.

'We have been sending everywhere to find you, sir. Mr Jones thinks something must be done at once.'

Mr Jones was the assistant house-surgeon, and a nervous gentleman, who liked to take just as little responsibility as was possible.

On reaching the ward, John found his colleague bending over the bed of a patient. The latter explained that the man had been working in the fields a few hours before, and, in lifting a portion of the trunk of a tree into his cart, had ruptured himself.

'He wouldn't wait for one of his mates to help him,' said Mr Jones, 'because they were a little behind time, and he must have been straining himself terribly.'

John looked at the patient. The face was pale and clammy, and denoted intense suffering, the pulse was quick and very feeble, and, while the doctor was feeling it, a fit of retching seized upon the patient.

'He has done nothing but retch since he has been here,' said the Sister, who was standing near the bed.

It was obvious to any surgeon that the man was not long for the world, if nothing could be done to relieve him.

After carefully examining the seat of injury, John came to the conclusion that a serious surgical operation would have to be done at once, and in this opinion Mr Jones quite coincided.

'But who is to do it?' said the latter. 'I have sent to every member of the staff, and it unfortunately happens that all are away, and although Mr Scott and Mr Palmer will be back in a few hours, do you think the patient can wait? I don't think he'll live till then,' he added, looking towards the man.

John shook his head. 'How about Dr Dawson?' he asked. 'I know he was at home about half-an-hour ago.'

'He was the last I sent to,' was the reply; 'the servant said her master had just hurried off to catch the train to Cromer, where he had been called to a consultation.'

‘Do you know, Armstrong, I think we ought to do the operation, and you are the senior. What do you say? There are one or two medical men in the town who would come in, and give us a helping hand.’

In spite of the gravity of the occasion, John could hardly help being amused at the promptitude with which his colleague had hit upon their obvious duty.

He felt sure the fact that he, and not Jones, was the senior, had something to do with the prompt decision. Taking, however, a rapid survey of the state of affairs, he decided that an immediate operation was necessary, and that he must do it. Then, having made up his mind, he at once proceeded to act.

‘Get everything ready, Jones,’ he said, ‘and I’ll send in to Hazlett; either he, or his assistant, will give us a hand.’

He then went up to the patient’s bedside, and explained what he proposed to do, and asked his consent.

‘Is it so urgent?’ gasped the poor fellow.

‘I’m afraid it is,’ replied John, ‘but I trust to be able to pull you through.’

Another spasm of pain seized the patient, and he cried out:—

‘Oh, do anything, but do give me relief for God’s sake.’

After a short interval all was ready, and John braced himself for his work.

It was a position which required some steadiness of nerve that he now found himself in.

The casualty had been bruited about, and had caused excitement, especially that the house-surgeon was about to operate in the absence of the regular staff, as the case required to be dealt with immediately. All this had created a stir, and there was more than an ordinary attendance to witness the operation.

Even Jones, as he gradually got the patient under the anæsthetic, felt a little anxious. What if Armstrong broke down : might not he be called upon to act ?

The thought made him shudder, and he looked anxiously towards the other, but the sight reassured him, and he intuitively felt that such a contingency was little likely—John did not look like failing.

It was true it was the first serious operation he had hitherto performed, and he knew that the life of a fellow creature in a great measure depended on his skill. He knew also, that he was being closely watched by many eyes, and that his future reputation might be considerably affected by the day's work. All this and more passed through his mind in the few minutes he was preparing himself for his task.

It must be confessed, however, he paid little heed to such thoughts—like phantoms vague and misty they flitted by. All his faculties were centred on the case. What was to be done, and how he was to do it. In his mind he was observing the details of his operation, and saw the difficulties to be met with, and to be overcome.

His colleague signified the patient was ready ; his instruments were prepared, and he applied himself to his work.

The case proved more than usually complicated, and although without difficulty much of the mischief might have been relieved, and Mr Hazlett more than once expressed an opinion that the operation was successfully accomplished, the younger surgeon thought otherwise, steadily persevered, and finally had the satisfaction of demonstrating that a more serious lesion existed, from which most likely the urgent symptoms had arisen.

He had succeeded in relieving this, and was about to close the operation, when a voice behind exclaimed,

'I can perceive that the welfare of the patients in the hospital has not suffered in my absence. Never was operation more skilfully performed! I congratulate you, Armstrong.'

It was the voice of Dr Dawson, who had just returned, and had hurried to the hospital.

The anæsthetic had been discontinued, and the patient was rapidly recovering from its effect. Already there was evidence in his aspect of the relief he had obtained.

His features were no longer so pinched, and the look of pain had given place to one of placidity and ease. His respiration had become natural, and he was relapsing into quiet sleep.

The bystanders looked at one another exultingly, feeling they had been witnesses to a life snatched from the grave, and ever and anon they glanced approvingly at the operator, whispering their opinion of his skill.

'Neatly done,' said Mr Hazlett to the assistant house-surgeon; 'really Armstrong ought to be one of the surgeons here. I'm sure none of the staff could have done it better.'

'Ah,' apostrophised Mr Jones, 'I told him it was his duty to operate, and felt sure he would do the job well.'

As to the truth of the latter sentiment, it is at least uncertain whether Jones at first did feel this confidence in his colleague, but there was no doubt he did so now. At the same time he felt a glow of elation at the success of the operation, and thought that he had himself added not a little to it.

In the meantime John, after giving all necessary instruction as to the treatment of his patient, was led away by Dr Dawson, who congratulated him warmly on the ability and promptitude he had shown in an emergency.

‘My boy, you were cut out for a surgeon. The world will hear more of you. I was anxious when I got back from Cromer, and found the message from the hospital ; but I feel glad now I was away, as it has given you an excellent opportunity of showing the metal you are made of.’

John thanked his senior for his kind words, and modestly replied that he had done no more than his duty, and that he had been specially lucky in hitting on the part where the mischief was. Otherwise he had only done what would be expected from any competent surgeon.

‘No, no, John,’ said Dr Dawson, ‘there was no luck in the matter. When you had unravelled the difficulty, I saw clearly how things were. The case was a complicated one, and had you trusted to luck, and not to a cool head, and a thorough knowledge of your art, it would have been a poor look out for your patient. Good heavens, what would have been the result if Jones had been the operator ? Where would have been his head ?’

Dr Dawson was a little down on this gentleman on the score of his exceeding nervousness, and had never forgotten how, on one memorable occasion during an operation, he had twice handed him a retractor when asked for a torsion forceps, and had behaved generally—as the latter expressed it—as if he did not know whether he was on his head or on his heels.

As Dr Dawson took his leave John muttered to himself, ‘The world will hear more of me. How is it possible, if I bury myself in a north country village ?’

The idea of carrying out his father’s wishes, of settling down in the native place of the Armstrongs, had been growing more and more irksome, and he felt he was capable of fighting the battle of life in a wider arena. A

dazzling vista of possible success seemed to tempt him to the great metropolis, where he might, in one of the theatres of a world-renowned hospital, repeat on a larger scale the success of that day.

If he could have given himself entirely to his art, if he could have lived the life of a true artist, great indeed might have been his future ; but other things were to have their influence on the young surgeon.

Little he then thought of what fate was preparing, or how great a change the lapse of a few years might bring.

The last thing that night John went to visit his patient. He found he had quite recovered from the anæsthetic, was free from pain, and overflowing with gratitude towards his surgeon.

'Thee hast saved my loife, doctor,' he murmured, 'oi can never thank thee, a poor labouring mon, loike meself.'

John comforted him on this score, and turning to leave the ward, was met by nurse Elliot.

'Dr Armstrong!' exclaimed the latter, 'I must thank you in my father's name for all you have done for this honest fellow. He is Joe Smith, and has worked on father's farm all his life, and a more industrious labourer farmer never had. Do you think he will do well?'

'Yes, certainly, nurse, the outlook is favourable. Your father ought soon to have him back again. It is a curious coincidence, and I am very glad to have been able to save a good servant for your father.'

CHAPTER IV

AN EXCURSION TO GREAT YARMOUTH

‘ This day is big with fate.’

AT twenty minutes to eight on Thursday morning, John stood at the door of Dr Dawson’s house. He had not long to wait, and on the door being opened he found Edith already arrayed for the journey and expecting him.

Mrs Dawson was not up, but Edith said her mother had specially enjoined her to ask what things she ought to take, and what time they would be probably back in the evening.

‘ Oh, you must have a few wraps,’ he said, ‘ for it may be chilly ; but of course we return by train, so we shall not be on the water after nightfall. We shall be back about half-past ten : a train leaves Yarmouth at 9.15. Now, if you don’t mind, Miss Dawson, we will be off, for we have about half-a-mile to go, and Paget wants us to be punctual. He said it would be necessary to start punctually at eight.’

‘ I am quite ready,’ was the reply, and handing a railway rug to the surgeon to carry, she tripped down the steps, followed by the other.

Edith was in good spirits, and looked on the expedition with unalloyed pleasure. She had for the moment forgotten about the existence of Mary Elliot, and she

thought that she was about to enjoy the attention of Dr Armstrong throughout the whole day, and such an idea gave her great pleasure. The morning was fresh and mild, and although there was a slight haze, everything seemed to point to weather of an exceptional character for the time of year.

As they drew near to the quay, they caught sight of the *Halcyon*—the steamer specially chartered for the occasion—gay with flags, and with awnings prepared in case of rain, puffing out volumes of smoke from her funnel, and showing that everything was ready for a start.

‘By Jove!’ said John, ‘we haven’t much time to spare. See, there is Paget already on board with his party. What a man for punctuality he is!’

‘But it is not eight yet,’ said his companion, and she pointed to an adjoining church tower, the clock of which gave evidence of the truth of the remark.

In a few minutes they were all on board.

‘Welcome to the *Halcyon*,’ said Mr Paget, running eagerly forward to shake hands with Edith, ‘I am so glad you have come, and I do hope we shall have a fine day. A river excursion is so much more enjoyable under a fair sky, and I am afraid we have been a little rash in choosing a time so late in the year for our trip. I think you had better take a seat over here,’ and the curate led the way to the saloon-deck of the vessel, where seats had been specially arranged for the ladies of the party. Then turning to John he said :—

‘So glad you’ve come, Armstrong, you are always a tower of strength; and we feel so much safer in event of accidents from having so good a surgeon on board. By-the-bye, I must congratulate you on your recent exploit at the hospital. I find the whole town ringing with it. It will shortly be in the papers.’

'Yes, Mr Paget, was it not nobly done?' said Edith; 'the man's life was saved, and papa told me he did not think any one could have done it but Dr Armstrong.'

A flush of excitement came to the face of the speaker as she uttered these words, and the curate only too accurately interpreted its meaning, when he noticed the look of pride with which she regarded her companion.

'Tut, tut, that is making a great deal of an ordinary matter,' said John, shaking hands with the clergyman.

'Ah, well, Miss Edith, we all know our doctor, how modest he is,' and a thoughtful look came over the curate's face. 'But why don't we start?' he added, as the clock struck eight, and the steamer still continued motionless by the side of the wharf.

'When are we off, captain?' he exclaimed, as a portly individual with yellow braid on his cap came bustling by.

'I'm ready, sir,' responded the latter, 'but I'm told all the party are not yet aboard.'

'They ought to be,' said Mr Paget, 'and I must see who the culprits are,' and he went off to make inquiries.

It turned out that Mary Elliot and her sister were missing, and John explained that it was possible Mary had gone to the hospital to meet her sister, who had been detained in the wards.

While it was being discussed as to what had better be done, an exclamation from one of the number gave notice that they were in sight. In a few minutes they were seen hurrying down to the water side, and as Mary Elliot, almost in tears, rushed across the gangway, she angrily exclaimed to her sister:—

'There, Emily, I have nearly lost the excursion through you! Had they gone without us I should never have forgiven you!'

A look of mild reproof crossed the features of her sister, but John and Mr Paget, who had overheard the

words, came up at this juncture, and the former gaily said :—

‘No, Miss Mary, you must not blame your sister for her zeal for duty, and indeed I’m sure it’s quite needless, for I know Mr Paget would never have gone without you.’

There was a certain amount of gallantry about the doctor’s words, which the curate did not like ; especially as this was said within earshot of Edith ; so he answered shortly, ‘I’m glad you are here. Now we can start at once.’

Notice was accordingly given to the captain, and at exactly ten minutes past eight the *Halcyon* parted her moorings, and steamed down the river.

The party were twenty in number, and chiefly composed of the workers in connection with the parish church of St Margaret. They included various grades of the society of Norwich.

There was the organist, a little fussy man, who was very shortsighted, and wore spectacles ; he was always making mistakes by addressing the wrong person, and was sometimes much in the way. Mr Middleton, however, was a sterling man in his vocation, and his playing was one of the attractions of St Margaret’s ; he was going to play the organ at the special Service to be held at St Nicholas, Yarmouth.

Another member of the party was Mr Aldridge, the senior churchwarden. He was a popular man, who did much good in the parish, and being a well-to-do merchant, of a generous disposition, his purse was always open to deserving calls, so that in a poor parish he was of the greatest assistance to the vicar, whose income from his benefice was by no means large, and out of it he had to support a numerous family.

If Mr Aldridge had a fault, it was one not uncommon

to churchwardens, a notion that every vicar has in his mind a determination to subvert the English Church Service as by law established, and that it is the duty of the churchwarden to be ready to prevent it, and, that he may do so, to oppose on principle the smallest change in ritual suggested by the vicar, no matter how reasonable that change may be.

As he had always been brought up on low church principles, he sometimes came into collision with Mr Paget, but owing to the tact of the latter, who recognised the sterling good qualities of the churchwarden, they were on the whole the best possible friends.

Lastly, we must not omit the Misses Tallboys, two maiden ladies of independent means, who were indefatigable in church work of all kinds. As they had no relations, and scarcely anything to do, and were both naturally of an active and industrious disposition, it was a godsend to them, and to the church, when the vicar of St Margaret's first found them out, and turned their energies into the present direction.

As they were thoroughly high church, they regarded the churchwarden as their natural enemy in all connected with church ritual, and whenever the vicar did not please them in his way of conducting the Services at St Margaret's, they never thought of blaming him, but charitably ascribed his failings to the sinister influence of the churchwarden.

They were both on the wrong side of forty, and although zealous workers, were not without the usual faults of their class, a tendency to gossip and scandal-bearing, with a proneness to be over censorious respecting their younger sisters.

They were particularly punctual themselves, and were not a little irritated by the delay caused by the Elliots, and they took critical notice of the attire of the younger,

whose get-up in the way of ornaments, and general brightness of colours, contrasted a little ill with the sobriety of dress displayed by the rest of the party.

The elders and the more staid seated themselves at the saloon end of the boat, where an awning was put up, which sheltered them pleasantly from cold draughts of air. Here they conversed, knitted, read papers, and amused themselves generally. The younger members could not sit so quietly, but promenaded the deck, chatting and laughing, and in the best of spirits.

John, who was always popular with young folks, was soon in great request, and though he had at first taken his seat by the side of Edith, he shortly after resigned it to Mr Paget, and went to assist, by his local knowledge, a group who were engaged in argument over some point in the landscape they were passing.

'Yes, it does give you a good idea of Dutch scenery,' said the organist; 'all this coarse pasture-land, dotted by windmills, and intersected by streams and ditches, is just what you can see any day running down the Maas.'

'Well,' rejoined Mr Aldridge, 'I've been to Holland, but I didn't get that impression of the scenery. Mind, I don't deny the country round here is flat, nor the prevalence of windmills; but my experience was that you could see scarcely anything of the country from the water. You might occasionally catch sight of the tops of trees and the summit of a windmill, but you more often than not saw nothing but the banks, for the chief part of the land was so much below the sea level, that it was more or less invisible from the deck of a steamer. What do you say, doctor?' he added, as the latter approached the group, 'have you been to Holland?'

'Yes,' was the reply, 'and I think you are both right. What Mr Aldridge says is quite true. In many places the land is considerably below the sea level, and he has

correctly observed the most striking features of the scenery. But it must not be forgotten that the whole of the Netherlands is not so low lying, and in places they do resemble this landscape. When you are driving along the country roads inside the dykes, the scenery is also not unlike this, and the guide-books describe the country about the Yare as being Dutch in character.'

'Oh, Dr Armstrong, when you were in Holland, did you see those nests for storks that I've been told every Dutchman has on his housetop?'

The last query came from Mary Elliot, who had been one of the group, and a listener to the conversation. As she spoke, she looked up coquettishly at the doctor.

'Well, Miss Mary, I can't say I did,' he replied, 'but I've no doubt there are plenty to be found.'

The steamer was making good way, and passing along swiftly seaward. The day was fine, and every one of the company seemed happy.

Under the awning on the saloon, Mr Paget, Miss Dawson, and the Misses Tallboys were surveying the prospect, and chatting gaily, but the curate observed that Edith's eyes frequently wandered towards John, and seemed specially to notice when he met Mary Elliot.

'That was a wonderful case of Dr Armstrong's at the hospital the other day, was it not, Mr Paget?' said the elder Miss Tallboys; 'the whole town is full of it.'

'Yes,' said Mr Paget, looking in the direction of the doctor, who at the moment was talking to the Elliot sisters, pointing out objects of interest, 'John Armstrong knows how to do his work. He is a thorough master of his profession. I'm glad he is with us to-day—not that we shall have any occasion for his professional services—but he is so good natured. Look how he is

endeavouring to render the trip agreeable for those Elliot girls. He shows no sign of being bored, and really Mary Elliot's chatter is not intellectual.'

He had seen Edith's uneasy glances towards the Elliots, and said this to reassure her, and divert her attention from a too obvious fact.

'What bold creatures those Elliots are,' said the elder to the younger Miss Tallboys. 'Look how Mary Elliot has turned her face up to the doctor's, I shouldn't be surprised to see her take his arm next.'

Poor Mary was the offender, and she certainly *was* a good deal absorbed in John's company.

Mr Middleton and Mr Aldridge now joined the saloon party.

'You haven't brought the doctor back,' said the senior Miss Tallboys.

'No,' he replied, 'you see he has other ladies on his hands.'

'Dr Armstrong,' said Mary Elliot, 'you know you promised to show me all sorts of things to-day.'

'Why, I thought it was you who were to entertain me,' he replied gaily, 'but I shall be happy to do what I can.'

'How can you be so rude, Mary,' said her sister. 'I wonder you dare to talk to the doctor like that.'

'Never mind, nurse, let your sister enjoy herself her own way—please don't reprove her,' said John, smiling. 'We don't like to be formal, do we, Miss Mary, when we are out for a holiday?'

Mary Elliot only pouted slightly for a reply, and then added, 'I'm sure, Emily, you would like me to go all day without opening my lips. Everything I say you find fault with.'

At this moment a gong gave notice that luncheon was ready.

'I'm so hungry,' said Mary Elliot, 'I should like

something to eat. 'Won't you take me down, and show me where the refreshments are?' And she looked up imploringly into John's face.

'Come along,' he replied good naturedly, and he led the way to the saloon, where preparation had been made for a substantial meal.

He soon found places for the two sisters.

'Here's a nice place for you, too, doctor,' exclaimed Mary, as she thanked him for finding her a seat.

But John's conscience was already reproaching him, and he replied, 'Thanks, no, I must go and look after my charge.'

With these words he nodded and left the saloon.

'Oh, Mary,' said her sister, when he had gone, 'how could you ask Dr Armstrong to sit by your side, while Miss Dawson was left on deck? He never ought to have brought us down before her. I'm sure she'll be offended.'

'I quite forgot all about her,' peevishly replied Mary.

In the meanwhile John approached Edith, who had not left her seat, although the group among whom she had been sitting was getting thinner.

'Come, Edith,' he said, 'you must want something to eat. They are beginning to feed below.'

Edith had felt a little neglected, but she gave no sign of displeasure, merely smiled, and rose from her seat. John led her into the cabin, and soon found her a seat on the opposite side of the table at which the Elliots were, and he himself sat down by her side.

The change and the fresh air had given the whole party an appetite, and ample justice was done to the provisions. Mr Paget got much praise for the thoughtful way in which he had catered for them.

By the time luncheon was over Burgh Castle was in sight, and preparations were made for landing.

Mr Paget, Dr Armstrong, and Edith Dawson were standing together on the deck, as the *Halcyon* began to slacken speed.

'It's a fine old ruin, is it not?' said the clergyman. 'For 1800 years these ramparts have towered from yonder eminence.'

'Yes,' said John, 'the Romans knew how to build. Look at that wonderful red tile, that lies between successive layers of stones: no one can make it now. Whatever they busied themselves about, in that they beat the world—Arms, Engineering, Jurisprudence—in all supreme.'

'I wonder,' said Edith, 'if all the surrounding country was as it is now, when the Roman legion held that fort?'

'I daresay it was,' replied John; 'there has not been much alteration here, except that, perhaps, Burgh was nearer the sea in those days.'

'They seem to be disembarking, Paget,' he added, as he observed the steamer had stopped. 'We had better follow.'

The party soon landed, and advanced to take possession of the old camp; but it was not done without climbing, as the ruins were situated on a considerable eminence.

Mr Paget led the way, John and Edith followed, and Mary Elliot with some of the younger members kept close behind. After a little labour they gained the ruins, and John, who was somewhat of a local antiquarian, gave a short account of their history.

'Ladies and gentlemen, you see here a striking memorial of the past: a reminiscence of a people who first civilised this island. Burgh Castle never was a castle in the ordinary acceptation of the word: it was in reality an old Roman camp, and antiquarians have been able to point out here most of the details of the typical *castra*, or camp of the Romans.

'The date of the structure is uncertain, but it was probably built at an early period of Roman occupation, directly the Romans advanced northward. You will notice this place is a point of vantage, and commands the Yare. Where we are now standing, Roman soldiers have probably stood, and looked out for their ships, as they came sailing up the river.'

'The sea came nearer then, did it not?' said Mr Aldridge.

'Yes, I should think so,' replied the doctor. 'What do you say, Paget?'

'It is notorious,' said the latter, 'that for many ages past the land has been gaining at the expense of the sea. Now you can only make out the sea from here on a fine day. It is not unlikely this camp may have been intended partly for coast defence.'

At this moment there was a scream in the immediate vicinity, and the whole party were thrown into consternation.

John, Mr Paget, and several others rushed to the spot whence the sound came. Its cause soon was made apparent, for they were met by one of the junior Sunday school teachers in a great state of alarm, who exclaimed, 'Oh, Mr Paget, what shall I do? Mary Elliot was trying to get a fern on that piece of wall, when a bush gave way and let her down.'

It then appeared that these two young folks, not appreciating the disquisition on the history of the place, had slipped away from the others, and the accident had occurred as above described.

They were soon at the spot, and, looking down, John saw the prostrate form of Mary Elliot lying on the grass below. He lost no time in descending the declivity, which was about fifteen feet in height, and was soon by her side, and began to examine her to see what injuries

she had sustained. He was quickly joined by Mr Paget, Mary's sister, and several others.

'Is she much hurt?' sobbed the sister,' bending down over the apparently lifeless form.

'No, no, she is only in a faint—she will be better soon. Get some water,' said John.

Water was procured, with which John bathed the face and temples, and he was soon rewarded by eliciting signs of returning animation.

Mary Elliot opened her eyes, gazed wildly round, and burst out crying.

'Don't cry like that,' said her sister. 'Try and tell Dr Armstrong where you are hurt.'

'Yes, try and tell me where you are hurt,' said John tenderly, as he bent over her.

'I'm hurt all over,' cried the patient, 'but, oh, my foot—it is agony.'

John carefully examined the injured part, and found the right ankle joint already much swollen, and exquisitely tender. There was not any fracture, but all the symptoms pointed to a severe sprain.

'There's nothing broken,' he said cheerfully. 'It's fortunate you fell on grass and soft soil, and not on one of these heaps of stones. You'll soon be right again, but I think it will be as well to get you back to the *Halcyon* as quickly as possible. Come, nurse, you can give me a hand with your sister, and will you, Paget, bring the rest on board when they are tired of the ruins?'

'Then you think, Armstrong,' said the latter, 'Miss Elliot has sustained no other injuries beyond a sprain, and you will see her to the boat? I will look after the others, and I don't think we shall be long.'

With that he hastened back to the rest, and reported that the injury was nothing more serious than a sprain,

but that it was necessary for Dr Armstrong to superintend the removal of the patient to the steamer.

'Is she much hurt?' said Edith, inquiringly to the curate, who fancied from the tone of her voice, that she wondered why a mere sprain needed such special attention on the part of the doctor.

'She fainted with pain,' he replied, 'but the only definite injury, I believe, is a sprain.'

'If there's mischief anywhere,' said the elder Miss Tallboys emphatically, 'that girl is sure to be in it. First she made us late, and now she's the cause of all this confusion. It's a pity she came at all.'

In the meanwhile John raised Mary Elliot from the ground, and tried to see whether she could walk. She screamed with pain on putting the foot to the ground.

'I'm afraid,' he said, 'it's no use trying to use that foot. Lean on me, and take your sister's arm on the other side.'

Mary did as directed, and a little progress was made towards the boat, but not without much pain. When half the distance had been travelled, John saw she was nearly exhausted.

'The best thing will be for me to carry her entirely,' he said to her sister. 'You won't mind, will you, Miss Mary, it will hurt much less than limping along.'

Suiting the action to his words, he lifted her like a child off the ground, and advanced more quickly towards the *Halcyon*, followed by Emily Elliot.

'It is good of you, indeed, Dr Armstrong,' murmured the patient. 'It's much better like this, I hardly feel any pain,' and she looked up gratefully into his face.

The rest of the party were now leaving the ruins, and as they descended, Dr Armstrong and the Elliots came into sight.

'Look, Miss Dawson,' said both the Miss Tallboys in a

breath, 'that Elliot girl must be bad, there's Dr Armstrong actually carrying her.'

Mr Paget, who overheard them, noticed a look of pain on Edith's face.

On gaining the *Halcyon* John took his burden down into the saloon, and placed her upon a couch, carefully adjusting a pillow under the injured ankle.

'You have been kind to me,' she said, 'what should I have done without your assistance! My foot is much better now;' she raised her eyes as she spoke, and looked into John's face with such an expression of trust and gratitude, that he felt more than ever fascinated by her beauty. The accident brought about a greater intimacy, so that the old attraction became intensified, and he was nearer, perhaps, than he had ever been, to confessing that his feelings towards Mary Elliot were of a different nature to those likely to be excited by a mere acquaintance, or even by a patient.

'It is very good of you, doctor,' said Emily Elliot, who had followed them down, 'but I will take charge of my sister now. I fear Miss Dawson will not thank us for claiming so much of your attention.'

'Don't think of that,' said John, 'she would be the first to wish me to assist your sister.'

They now heard overhead the party returning to the steamer, so with a few directions as to the treatment of the patient's foot, John went on deck.

He was immediately surrounded by inquirers.

'I should think, doctor,' said Miss Tallboys, 'your patient must have fatigued you. It must have been no easy matter to carry her over that rough ground. I know it has made me tired. She isn't much hurt, is she?' she added in a tone of incredulity.

'She has a nasty sprain,' was the reply, 'and won't be able to walk for some time.'

'Can I do anything, Dr Armstrong?' said Edith, approaching.

'No, thank you, I think she will be quite safe in the hands of her sister, who understands cases of this kind.'

'Ah,' remarked Mr Aldridge to the curate, 'it's as well after all we carry a surgeon. How easily accidents happen !

The *Halcyon* was now rapidly approaching Yarmouth, and before long the spire of St Nicholas Church came into view, and the increase in the number and size of the shipping showed that a port of some pretensions was being neared.

Soon they arrived at the quay, and were gazing at the curious old houses that surrounded it.

'This certainly has a Dutch look, Mr Aldridge,' said John, pointing to the houses facing the quay, the shipping, and the swing bridge. 'You see that tavern there. It is said—but the authority is a little doubtful—that the execution of Charles I. was decided on by the regicides there.'

'Indeed,' said Mr Middleton, 'what an interesting scene it is !'

On landing it was decided that the party should disperse, and wander about the town till five o'clock, when they were all to meet at the parish church. It was just three, so they would have two hours.

As Mary Elliot could not walk, it was necessary to leave her on the *Halcyon*; and John arranged with Emily, who agreed to remain with her, to bring an invalid's chair to the landing stage after the conclusion of the service at St Nicholas, to transport the patient to the railway station.

Mr Paget, Edith, and John, strolled about the town together, looking at the various points of interest, going

through the quaint rows, and inspecting the splendid sea front.

The day had been faultless, and it was only now beginning to be a little chilly, so John insisted on Edith putting on her wraps, because the air was much keener than at Norwich.

'I'm sorry for that poor girl,' remarked John; 'she will be dreadfully dull all by herself in the boat.'

'She has got her sister,' said Mr Paget, a little irritated at John again introducing the subject before Edith. 'To tell the truth, she has been the chief obstacle to the success of the excursion. Why did she want to run into danger as she did?'

'I don't think she thought of what she was doing,' mildly suggested Edith.

'I declare, Miss Dawson is more charitable than you, Paget,' said John. 'What did the poor child care for our antiquarian discussion! What more natural than she should look after the ferns!'

At five o'clock the party assembled at St Nicholas. The Rev. Mr Robinson, the vicar, shook hands with Mr Paget, who was an old friend, and kindly showed the numerous interesting things about the church.

After this, Evensong was said by the two clergymen.

At the conclusion Mr Middleton played selections on the fine old organ.

Edith sitting with John in that ancient parish church, while the wintry evening was drawing on and the sacred music rolled through the aisles, thought earnestly of the future. Would the manly form by her side always be her protector? Would it be hers to call him husband?

How different, on the other hand, were John's thoughts. He was thinking little of his companion, little of the future. His thoughts were busy over the

events of the day, Mary Elliot's accident, and her absence from the Service, which he knew she missed greatly.

'Poor girl,' he thought, 'she specially alluded to it at the hospital, when she asked me to come on the excursion. What a disappointment—women do like this sort of thing!'

After the Service, they made their way to the railway station.

A chair was obtained for Mary Elliot, and her removal was superintended by John. Later in the evening the whole party arrived safely at Norwich.

'Did you see the look that girl gave Dr Armstrong, as he helped her out of the carriage,' said the elder Miss Tallboys to her sister, as the two left the Norwich railway station. 'I suppose she didn't sprain her ankle on purpose?'

CHAPTER V

THE SURGEON AND HIS PATIENT

'Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt
not escape calumny.'

MARY ELLIOT resided with a fellow post-office clerk, Janet Tomkins. They shared the expense of a sitting and two bedrooms.

Mrs Smith was their landlady, the widow of an old Yare bargeman, who after a long life of thrift and industry, had just managed to leave his widow a house with a small pittance for housekeeping, which the good woman tried to eke out, by letting the best part of her home when the opportunity offered.

As the two girls had their dinner out most days, and were, in fact, away the greater part of the time, the widow had but little trouble, and the arrangement had proved satisfactory for all parties. But when, on the night of the excursion, Mrs Smith and Janet Tomkins saw Mary carried into the house in a generally exhausted condition, both were not a little frightened.

'What is the matter with Mary?' said Janet to Emily, who accompanied her sister.

'She has sprained her ankle,' was the reply, 'and Dr Armstrong says she must lie in bed for a few days. She met with an accident in the afternoon, and fell

down. You might help me to get her upstairs, as her foot is very painful.'

Both were at once all sympathy, and gave their best assistance, and in a short time Mary was put to bed, and her ankle placed in a comfortable position; after which, tired out with pain and excitement, she soon fell asleep.

Her sister descended to the sitting-room, where she chatted with Janet, giving an account of all the day's doings; then after saying good-night, she went into the kitchen to speak to the landlady, whom she found enjoying a modest half-pint of porter before going to bed.

'I do hope, Mrs Smith,' she said, 'my sister's accident won't throw much extra work on you. I shall call every day to attend to her ankle, and we shall soon have her downstairs.'

'Don't ye mind the extra work, dear,' said the landlady. 'I'm sure I'm sorry for the poor body; the accident must have spoilt the day for her, and she was always so gay and cheerylike. Why, she was on the chatter about this day for weeks past. What shall I give her for breakfast? And won't ye sit down, and have a taste of something before ye return to the 'ospital?' And she tried to induce Emily to sit down at her humble table.

'Thank you, Mrs Smith,' was the reply, 'it's very kind of you, but I must get back, as it's late. Please give Mary a little bread and milk, or a cup of tea with toast in the morning.' Then, after a little hesitation, Emily said, to the surprise of the landlady—

'Might I ask a favour, Mrs Smith?'

'Certainly, my dear.'

'If Dr Armstrong calls to see my sister, will you always be sure to be in the room?' Then noticing the landlady's look of astonishment, she continued, 'You know how people do talk, and Mary is so giddy.'

'Very well, my dear, I'll see to it,' said the good-natured woman, who could not help admiring the tender solicitude and maternal instinct of the elder sister.

As Emily walked back to the hospital, certain fears began to be more pronounced in her mind, fears, which, hardly formulated before, the events of the day had clearly brought to her consciousness.

She saw there was danger, great danger, in any increase of intimacy between the doctor and her sister. In his treatment of the latter during the day, she thought she detected an unusual tenderness, that is, something more than the tenderness befitting the relation of surgeon and patient.

Then as to her sister, her behaviour, whether ingenuous or not, was only too calculated to attract and fix the attention of any susceptible youth; and although Dr Armstrong was the last man she would have thought likely to be captivated in this way, she had lately begun to have doubts.

When she entered the hospital, the porter told her Dr Armstrong would like to see her before she went to bed, so she called at his room.

'How is your sister to-night?' he said. 'Have you got her comfortably to bed?'

'Yes, sir, she went to sleep almost directly.'

'I will call and see her to-morrow,' continued John. 'I don't think it will be a long job, but it's rather a nasty sprain.'

'Do you think, sir,' said the nurse with some hesitation, 'there is any necessity for you to call? If I let you know how the ankle is, would not that be sufficient?'

'But why not call, nurse?' he answered, surprised at her question. 'I presume you have no objection to my calling.'

Emily looked as if she had an objection, but did not

say so. Thanking the doctor, she wished him good-night, and retired.

John sat down and smoked. He thought of Edith, Mary Elliot, and all that had happened that day.

Did he feel any inclination to fall in love with Mary Elliot? He now began to question himself on the subject.

She was very pretty. What wonderful eyes she had ! What a beaming look of love and gratitude she gave him, after he had eased her ankle ! What fee could compare with such payment !

On the whole he did not quite answer the question, but he could not help confessing that of all the ladies he knew, Mary occupied most of his thoughts.

'I don't want to be talked about,' he thought, 'people are so fond of scandal. What did nurse Elliot mean by almost objecting to my calling on her sister? I've heard Charley say Mary Elliot tries to flirt with me. It wouldn't do for such a report to come to Mrs Dawson or the doctor.'

On the following day he visited his patient, and found the ankle better. Mary was profuse in her thanks, and Mrs Smith, who, faithful to her promise of the previous evening, took care to be present, after regarding the pair, came to the conclusion that Emily's caution was not altogether unnecessary ; this younger sister was certainly somewhat of a flirt, and how soon these poor creatures got into trouble ! Yes, she did not want harm to come while under her roof.

Mary was soon downstairs on the sofa, but John called every day, and although Mrs Smith used every endeavour to favour the pair with her company, it would occasionally happen that a hitch took place in the arrangement, and while an importunate milkman or

other tradesman engaged the attention of the worthy landlady, the two were left entirely to themselves.

Then, it is to be regretted, John did not entirely adhere to his character as a professional adviser only, and Mary behaved with more familiarity than is usual between doctor and young lady patient, and her conduct was such as would certainly have brought her sister's disapproval, had she been present.

The frequency, however, of the doctor's visits, and the character Mary possessed, did excite comment, and one evening Janet Tomkins on her return from the post-office burst into the sitting-room, and startled Mary by saying :—

'Well, Mary, there's nice talk going about the town! What do you think I heard to-day?'

'How can I tell?' peevishly replied the other.

'Miss Knaggs, the superintendent, called me into her office, and told me she had heard that there was nothing much the matter with you, but that Dr Armstrong was calling every day, and staying a long while; that you were always watching at the window, and that for a long time past you had been setting your cap at him.'

'Oh, what a shame!' burst out the other, crying, 'what a shame to try and ruin a poor girl! Who can have been telling such wicked lies?' and she sobbed bitterly.

'Well, Mary, don't take on so,' said her friend. 'I think she mentioned a Miss Tallboys as the person who spoke about your behaviour at the excursion. She said she believed you pretended your ankle was bad to get the doctor to carry you.'

'Oh, the nasty, spiteful cat!' sobbed Mary.

At this moment her sister Emily entered the room. She had just called, and was not a little surprised to see Mary in tears.

Janet explained the matter, and told her of Miss Knaggs' remarks.

'Isn't it spiteful?' sobbed her sister. 'Would you have thought it possible, Emily?'

'Do you give occasion for gossip, Mary? Does Dr Armstrong come here every day?' asked her sister.

'When he is here, Mrs Smith is always with us.'

Emily gave a sigh of relief, and felt very grateful to the landlady. 'But the world outside doesn't know that, Mary,' she continued. 'It is so necessary to be careful. I wonder Dr Armstrong is not more thoughtful.'

'Surely,' replied her sister, 'you are not going to blame him for being kind to me?'

'Is it kind,' indignantly rejoined Emily; 'what are you going to do when you return to your duties? Miss Knaggs may report you to the post-office authorities.'

'She did say,' interrupted Janet, 'she must know more about this.'

'I will call and speak to her,' said Emily; 'and now, Mary, something must be done to put an end to this. I have just received a letter from father. He writes to ask us to come to the farm before Christmas; that he expected both of us then, but would be glad to see either of us earlier. Now, to-day is Wednesday: I shall write and ask him to meet you at Fritton station on Friday. Your ankle is much better, and a change to the country would be very natural under the circumstances.'

'I won't be sent home, as if I had misbehaved,' replied Mary, with flashing eyes. 'People will think there's something in these lies.'

'They certainly will if you don't go,' rejoined the other.

'I should do what your sister advises, Mary,' mildly suggested Janet Tomkins, 'that would most likely satisfy Miss Knaggs, and all the gossip would soon subside.'

'Of course Mary will,' said the elder sister imperiously; 'and I'll take care Dr Armstrong doesn't call again.'

'No, no, Emily, I won't have it,' and Mary again gave way to a fit of hysterical sobbing. 'You are not to go to Dr Armstrong with these spiteful stories. What will he think of me? I will go home if you like, but promise me you won't say anything. Promise me that, anyhow,' and she stamped her foot upon the ground.

'Well,' was the reply, 'whether I say anything to Dr Armstrong or not will depend entirely on your own promptness in doing all you can to stop this scandal.'

Mary could get no more favourable terms, so she was forced to be contented, and shortly after Mrs Smith brought the tea things into the room, and the three sat down to tea.

'Will you be able to leave the hospital and go home for Christmas, Emily?' asked Janet.

'I think so,' was the answer. 'I spoke to Dr Armstrong, and he said he would take care I had leave of absence; that he would make it his business to see to it before he went home to the north to spend Christmas.'

'Do you know, Emily,' said Mary, 'the Dawsons are going to spend Christmas with Dr Armstrong's father?'

'Indeed,' rejoined her sister, 'I was not aware of it.'

'Oh, yes, Dr Armstrong told me so.'

Emily made no further comment, but looked closely at Janet, who did not, however, seem to have paid any attention to this remark of Mary's.

After tea the three girls sat together chatting and doing needlework for a couple of hours, and Mary's good spirits returned. So much so, that she got talking to her sister about their home, and the Christmas they hoped to spend together.

'I shall be glad to see them all again,' she said. 'Do

you remember, Emily, George Burrows burning his fingers last Christmas at snapdragon?'

'I thought George was a sweetheart, Mary? You were much together last year.'

'Well, yes, I liked him very well. He's the best dancer at Fritton.'

'He's a most respectable man, Mary. Owns his own farm, and I am quite sure is thoroughly honourable.'

Mary yawned. 'Very likely he's all that. I shall see him when I go home. I daresay he won't be long in finding me out.'

A little later Emily rose to return.

She thought the scandal about her sister serious, and felt surprised at Dr Armstrong. How could it be necessary to go every day to see her sister? So clever a man must know what people would be likely to say. How could he run the risk of doing so terrible an injury to Mary?

Emily was not altogether correct in her surmises. Your clever men are by no means necessarily the first to grasp what is often sufficiently plain to an ordinary intelligence, and to do the doctor justice, Emily's view of his conduct, though a true one, had never presented itself in this light to his mind.

Emily thought she ought to speak to the doctor, but it seemed a very difficult thing to do.

How could she, a nurse only, criticise the conduct of the chief resident officer of the institution?

Then the thought occurred to her that they had no mother, and that it was incumbent on her to protect her younger sister, and supply a mother's place. She remembered her mother's delight in Mary when a child; laughing and happy, wayward and spoiled, filling the house with sunshine, and bringing smiles to the faces of her parents.

‘If mother could see me,’ she mused, ‘I think she would wish me to speak.’

So she determined she would have an interview with Dr Armstrong, and as no time was like the present, she would see him that very night.

On reaching the hospital she ascertained that he was in his room, and thither she accordingly directed her steps. She hesitated for a moment before the door, and then knocked boldly. When she heard his voice bidding her enter, although she felt a trembling in her limbs, she resolved to carry out what she had undertaken.

‘What! is it you, Nurse Elliot? Nothing wrong, I hope?’

‘I have just returned, Dr Armstrong, from seeing my sister.’

‘Well, you find her much better, don’t you? She’ll soon be able to get about now.’

‘Yes, doctor, her ankle is much better,’ said Emily, ‘but it was not about that I came—’

‘Why, nurse, what on earth’s the matter?’ said John, in a tone of surprise.

‘I hope, Dr Armstrong, you won’t be offended at what I say—but Mary has no mother’—the tears came to her eyes, and her voice was a little broken—‘and I don’t want to write to father, so I thought I would be so bold as to come and ask you why you are so regardless of my sister’s good name?’

John’s face turned crimson. ‘Nurse Elliot, what do you mean? I have done my best to cure your sister, and now you speak to me in this way!’ And he regarded her sternly, but she replied:—

‘Do you know what people are saying about Mary, and how they are putting your name with hers in a way which may be ruin to her? What matters curing her ankle, doctor, if her character be lost?’

A change came over his face, and again the colour rushed to his cheeks ; the weakness of his position was apparent, and it was not so easy to answer the indignant sister.

‘Is it really so?’ he said. ‘How uncharitable people are! It would seem that a doctor can’t visit a patient’s house without giving rise to scandal.’

‘But Mary has been much better for some time. Why should a doctor call every day?’

Dr Armstrong blushed still more deeply, he felt his position untenable.

‘I have been thoughtless, nurse ; can I do anything to repair my fault?’

‘Mary is going on Friday to stay with father till after Christmas, but I do hope, sir, you will not call again while she is in Norwich.’

Dr Armstrong promised not to do so, and with many expressions of regret for the harm he had inadvertently done, he wished Emily good-night.

The other retired with a feeling of relief that the ordeal was over, and that she had done her duty as far as lay in her power.

But John was upset by the occurrence. Was he becoming the talk of Norwich?

He must, indeed, take care. Did Dr Dawson know of this, and Christmas close at hand, when they were all to meet round his father’s hearth?

How could he have been so foolish? For a moment he felt angry with Mary Elliot, and it must be confessed with sorrow, that most of his regret was of a selfish character, and proceeded from a fear of injury to his own reputation.

Dr Dawson was surgeon to the Norwich post-office, and on making one of his official visits a few days later, he was not a little surprised when the superintendent

of the female staff asked to have a few words in private.

On entering her office Miss Knaggs rose to meet him, and said she wished to consult him about a delicate matter. Dr Dawson regarded the superintendent with some astonishment.

‘Do you know a Miss Mary Elliot, doctor?’ she said.

‘No, I don’t—but stay,’ he added,—‘one of our nurses at the hospital is called Elliot, and I think she has a sister.’

‘Right,’ said Miss Knaggs. ‘Nurse Elliot has just been to see me; this sister is one of our clerks, and has been away from her duties for some time past with a bad ankle.’

‘Oh, now I remember,’ exclaimed the doctor, ‘I heard from Dr Armstrong that Nurse Elliot’s sister met with an accident at an excursion last month.’

‘This is the point, Dr Dawson,’ said the other. ‘I find there is scandal being talked about the town in which the names of Mary Elliot and Dr Armstrong are mixed up, and as the latter is your house-surgeon, and I have always heard the best reports about him, I thought I ought to speak to you on the subject. I never saw harm in the girl; she has struck me as flighty and inclined to dress and finery, and I have thought her general intelligence below the average, but she is just the girl who might be led astray by an unscrupulous man wanting in principle, and—’

‘Stay, madam, I must ask you to pause,’ interrupted Dr Dawson, sternly. ‘Dr Armstrong is neither unscrupulous nor wanting in principle, and what you are suggesting is an infamous slander on him. I may inform you, Miss Knaggs, I have known him all his life, and his sister is going to marry my son. Who spread this report? It must be looked to!’

'Oh, no offence, doctor—I'm sure I meant no offence,' replied the superintendent, taken aback at the other's vehemence. 'I'm very glad to hear you say so, but I must be so particular. These girls of mine do require such looking after. Mr Johnstone' (he was the superintendent of the male clerks) 'is always complaining of the trouble the men give, but his difficulties are nothing to mine. You don't think, then, there is anything in this? Your nurse tells me her sister has gone home till after Christmas.'

'Nothing in it? Of course there's nothing in it,' retorted the doctor, 'that is, as far as Dr Armstrong is concerned. Who set this going?'

'Well, Miss Tallboys gave me some rather curious information as to Mary Elliot's behaviour at the excursion, where the accident happened, and I heard several of my clerks tittering the other day, and the names of Dr Armstrong and this girl being bandied about. When I made inquiries, I found that the attention the doctor was paying her was the topic of conversation.'

'I could have sworn,' said Dr Dawson, 'that malicious old woman was at the bottom of it. It is all the merest chatter. Dr Armstrong has probably been attending to the girl's ankle—a sprain is sometimes serious—as he was present when the accident occurred, he has no doubt gone on with the treatment.'

'You have greatly relieved me, doctor. You have taken quite a weight off my mind. I thought you were the right person to consult.'

Dr Dawson said 'Good morning' to the superintendent, and retired.

As he drove home, however, the matter recurred again to his mind, and the reasoning he had found efficacious with Miss Knaggs did not seem so satisfying to himself.

Could it be possible he had made a mistake in his

estimate of John, to whom he hoped at a no distant date to give Edith? He thought he could remember Charley rallying him about some pretty girl. Could it have been this Mary Elliot?

What would his wife think? Should he tell her? No, on the whole he thought it would be better to say nothing, but he would look a little more closely after John.

Probably there was very little in it after all.

CHAPTER VI

TWO CHRISTMAS SCENES

‘I had a dream, which was not all a dream.’

It was Christmas morning, and the snow was falling heavily. Dawn was just breaking over Northcote Farm, and Farmer Elliot, rising betimes to look after the necessary work, shivered as he peeped through the heavily frosted panes.

‘’Twill be a seasonable Christmas,’ he muttered. ‘It looks snowy and the frost severe. The stock will want seeing to,’ and he hurried to dress himself, and was soon facing the snow and the keen wind, on his way to the stables to look after the young colts.

Farmer Elliot was fifty years of age, and from his earliest youth had risen with the sun, and worked on his own or his father’s farm.

He was hale and hearty, and enjoyed to the full that health which avocations of this kind are known to afford.

He was well aware that at the present day, if profit is to be got out of a farm, the master must see after the work himself.

The noise made by the farmer in dressing aroused two others who occupied adjoining rooms. Emily and Mary Elliot were sleeping together, and the former, ac-

customed to early rising, was first to hear her father getting up, and at once decided to follow his example, and see if she could be of any use downstairs, where the supply of servants was limited.

She accordingly began to dress, and in so doing aroused her sister, who in a sleepy manner endeavoured to dissuade her from rising.

‘Why, it can’t be six o’clock, Emily?’

‘Oh, yes it is, Mary, I must get up. What sort of breakfast will you get if we both lie abed? You don’t expect father to see to it all?’

‘There’s Betsy,’ said the other.

Betsy was an old woman, who had been forty years in the family, and was general servant.

‘Betsy can’t do everything,’ replied her sister; ‘we must be reasonable, and give some help as we make extra work.’

Mary made an ambiguous answer, and relapsed into slumber, while Emily hastened to put on her clothes and descend to assist in the general work.

She found her father returning from a visit to the stables, and shaking the snow from his boots.

‘What, Emily, lass, ye’re early down. It looks like a cold morning: the water’s froze hard; we’ll have some trouble with the stock.’

‘A happy Christmas to you, father, a very happy one,’ said Emily, putting her arms round his neck, and kissing him. ‘Now you must let me help all I can.’

‘Ah, Emily, ye always were a useful body. The old farm is quite another place when ye are here. I want Betsy to make a mash for a sick horse, so ye might see to the breakfast, and ease her a bit there. Mary abed, I suppose?’

‘Yes, she’s tired, father, so I left her there.’

‘Right, lass, quite right.’

The farmer then went into the kitchen to instruct Betsy, and Emily set to work to light the parlour fire, and make preparation for the morning meal.

Northcote Farmhouse was a rambling building, which had once been the manor house. It was a structure of a somewhat pretentious character, dating back three or four centuries. The only remains of antiquity, however, consisted of a curious block of chimney stacks, which gave quite a feature to the house: these were hexagonal in shape, and of massive stone, and looked fit to last a few centuries more.

Most parts of the building had fallen to pieces from time to time, and had been renovated to meet existing requirements, so that the house now consisted of a good-sized hall, with three rooms, each on a different level, and a large kitchen on the ground floor. On the floor above, to which access was gained by a central staircase, were six bedrooms, which mostly communicated with one another; the windows were latticed, and the roof covered with red tiles.

It was in fact a typical farmhouse, and with the exception of the chimney stack, many like it are to be found scattered over the eastern counties.

Emily soon had a blazing fire in the parlour, and the table covered with preparations for a substantial meal. When she saw that all was ready, that Betsy could manage the rest, and also heard her father's voice in the distance, she judged that he would shortly be ready for breakfast, and ran upstairs to see if Mary were getting up.

'Come, Mary,' she cried, 'father is just going to sit down to breakfast. Do get up! He'll be so disappointed if we don't sit down with him on Christmas day. I thought you were ready to come down. But—what's the matter? Are you ill?'

The last question was caused by the strange behaviour of her sister. She started up in her bed with a half suppressed cry, trembling all over. When Emily drew up the window blind, she saw that her sister's face was deathly pale, and covered with large drops of perspiration.

'Why, Mary, what is all this?' she exclaimed with trepidation; 'you were all right when I left you two hours ago.'

'I've had such a shocking dream,' she gasped. 'Don't go away—stay with me—what shall I do?'

'It was a nightmare, Mary, that's what it was,' confidently said her sister.

'I thought I was drowning,' continued Mary. 'Oh, I'm so cold' (shivering violently and drawing the blanket round her)! 'I seemed to be struggling in the broad again, and George was not there to help me—and Emily,'—here she convulsively seized her sister by the arm—'I thought it was Dr Armstrong who was holding me under the water and making me drown.'

'Are you in your right mind, Mary?' said the other angrily. 'What has Dr Armstrong to do with you? The truth is, you're ill, and have not got over your accident. You must have taken cold.'

'Oh, Emily, I can't get Dr Armstrong out of my thoughts since I promised to marry George.'

'Don't mention Dr Armstrong's name again, Mary! I won't hear it! You had better remain in bed, and I'll tell father you are not well.'

She accordingly made her sister lie down again, and covered her up warmly. 'I'll bring you up your breakfast here,' she said soothingly, and she drew up the blinds, letting in the sunshine, for the sun was now shining and giving every prospect of a fine day. The bells, too, of the parish church began to ring for early service, so

that Mary soon began to feel more cheerful, and to throw off the effects of the nightmare.

Emily went down to breakfast with her father.

'Where's the other lass?' he asked. 'A farmer's wife ought to rise betimes. What will George do when she is mistress of Southwick? He won't like to take his breakfast by himself.'

'Mary's not well, father,' said Emily; 'she has had a nightmare, and I've made her stay in bed. I fear she has not got over that fall into the water.'

'Perhaps I had better send Joe for Dr Ling after breakfast,' said Farmer Elliot, putting down his knife and fork, and looking anxious; 'she did seem to get over it too easily.'

'I don't think she's as bad as that, father.' 'We had better wait a bit; she may be all right in an hour or two.'

To render this conversation intelligible to our readers, it will be necessary to narrate an occurrence which took place a short time before.

Mary had left Norwich, as described in the last chapter, and had been staying at the farm some weeks.

With her usual tendency to seek amusement wherever it could be found, she had eagerly thrown herself into all the local excitements, and had been a frequent visitor at the neighbouring farms. As may be imagined, it was not long before the flirtation between George Burrows and herself was renewed.

George was a type of a healthy east Anglian farmer; strong and well-proportioned, standing five feet eight in his stockings, light complexioned, and with a good word for every one. He was the owner of one of the best farms in the district, and a special favourite with Mary's father.

When the frost set in about ten days before Christmas,

there was a general rush to the ice as soon as it was thought likely to bear, and foremost, as might be expected, was Mary Elliot.

Dangerous, indeed, to the community is the advent of the frost for many reasons, but there is one special danger too well known ; and never a frost of any severity occurs, but a number of thoughtless persons loose their young lives.

In and near large centres of population, public control does much to lessen danger by careful supervision, and by excluding all from the ice till its strength is beyond suspicion ; but it is not always possible to do so in country places, and there, as might be expected, appalling accidents occur.

It happened that on a certain afternoon, about six days before Christmas, the inhabitants of Fritton and the surrounding villages had come in unusual number to a portion of the broad about a mile from Northcote Farm.

Among them in more than ordinary spirits was Mary, who was a good skater, and exceedingly fond of showing her skill at this pastime.

The ice, on the whole, was fairly safe ; but a partial thaw had set in that afternoon, and all had been warned not to go near a part, where the freezing had not been so complete as elsewhere.

Mary was in her element, and fortunately George Burrows, who was also present, followed her with the ardour of a much enamoured swain, and would not let her out of his sight.

It must be acknowledged with regret that Mary, although aware of his passion, was amusing herself by flirting with some of the other young farmers.

An exciting game at 'touch' was in full swing, and Mary with glowing cheeks was being chased all over the ice, now dodging behind one of the little islets, which

studded the broad, now boldly shooting across the open, in full view of her pursuers.

In the excitement of the game, and becoming more and more hotly pressed, she forgot her proximity to the dangerous portion of the ice. She had some start of the others, and only became aware of the danger by their shouts of warning, while at the same time she felt the ice cracking beneath her feet.

She had little of Emily's presence of mind : the danger seemed to paralyse her judgment, and instead of deviating in her course, and bearing away from the rotten ice, she tried to cross it. She made the attempt, too, in a nervous, hesitating manner, with the result that one of her skates caught in a lump of snow, and she was precipitated violently on to the weakest portion of the ice.

There was a crash as the ice gave way, and Mary disappeared beneath the surface.

A shout of terror rose from all ; and George Burrows, who was only a few yards behind the ill-fated girl, at once stopped, knelt down, and cautiously crawled to the margin of the broken ice. At the same time he shouted to those on the bank to make haste and get some ropes. He then thrust his hand and arm under the water to grasp Mary, if she rose to the surface.

So prompt had been his action and rapid his movements, that he was anxiously feeling for Mary within a few seconds of her immersion, and great was his joy almost immediately to feel one of her arms, as she came up to the surface. In a moment he got her head above water, amid cheers from the bank. A strong rope was drawn across from bank to bank, while George fastened another round Mary just below her arms. He, then, with assistance drew her out of the water and got her on shore.

Mary had evidently been conscious during the whole of these proceedings, but was very frightened, and finally burst out into a fit of hysterical sobbing. She was taken home and put to bed; but the following day, except for a little depression of mind, she was herself again.

The chief result of the accident, however, was that the relations between her and George Burrows became settled; for the latter's gallant conduct was in every one's mouth, and her father became his chief partisan, and almost in words told her what it was incumbent on her to do.

Mary felt the deepest gratitude, a feeling which at that time seemed like love, although it was not so. The nearest approach to this passion had been excited by Dr Armstrong, and as the time for making a final decision came, the thought of him kept recurring to her mind.

'He would never marry me,' she thought. 'They wouldn't let him. He's to marry Miss Dawson.'

Mary was, moreover, peculiarly sensitive to public opinion, although from thoughtlessness she had often been near outraging it, and she saw clearly that her neighbours expected her to accept this young farmer, so on the third day after the accident she made him happy by promising to be his wife.

Emily, on arriving at the farm, heard the news with great satisfaction. It was true her sister and Dr Armstrong were not likely to meet in the future, but she did not know how far the old flirtation had gone, and it was therefore with thankfulness she learned that Mary was solemnly pledged to another. 'With all her giddiness,' she thought, 'that will keep her straight.'

The wedding was to be at the latter end of the next year, and in the meanwhile Mary was to stay at Northcote

Farm, and to do her best to learn the duties of a farmer's wife, and by helping to manage her father's household prepare to be the mistress of Southwick, which was the name of George's farm.

Emily and her father finished their breakfast, and an hour later Mary came down. She had apparently quite recovered, and expressed an intention of going to church.

Emily agreed to accompany her, and a little later the two sisters set out for Fritton Church. The weather had cleared, and it was a bright frosty morning, with quite a brilliant sun. Everywhere nature was covered with a white mantle, and the crystals of snow in countless places on trees and hedges sparkled like diamonds.

The church bells, too, began to peal merrily, and as they passed along the road kindly greetings were exchanged with their neighbours.

Before half the distance between the farm and the church had been traversed, they were met by George Burrows and his sister : the former promptly took possession of Mary, handing over his sister to Emily.

Jane Burrows, George's sister, was a healthy, unaffected, and unassuming girl, and a special favourite with Emily. She saw the warmth with which her brother greeted his sweetheart, and said, 'Emily, George does so dote on Mary. He worships the ground she walks on. I really don't know how he'll be able to wait till next autumn.'

'I trust she'll make a good wife,' was the reply ; 'but she'll want quite a year to learn to be of use on a farm, for unfortunately she is so slow learning, and seems to dislike home work.'

'I hope,' said George tenderly, 'you don't feel any ill effects from that accident, Mary? Oughtn't you to have seen the doctor? What a shock it must have been, dear.'

'Nonsense, George,' she replied, 'where's the good of making a fuss about nothing. I'm quite well, so why should I go to the doctor? The worst that has come of the wetting has been a nasty dream.'

'A dream, Mary? Why, what could you have had to dream about?'

'I dreamt, George,' she said with a shudder, 'I was being drowned again, and you were not there to save me. It was a terrible feeling, but only a dream. You don't believe in dreams, do you?'

'Believe in dreams, dear? I should think not,' said George. 'I don't know how often poor mother used to dream the house was going to be burnt down, and would eagerly look out the insurance policy to see that all was right, but Southwick still remains unburnt—indeed, has never been afire.'

Morning Service was duly attended, and at its close the Elliots returned home, bringing with them George and his sister, who had been invited to spend the day at Northcote Farm.

A pleasant, happy day was passed, in which the lovers had plenty of time to themselves; in the evening Mary sang her songs, which Janet accompanied on the piano, and which were enthusiastically received by George, while the old farmer smoked his pipe, and looked benignly on the others in a true Christmas feeling of love and goodwill to all; now criticising the music, now poking fun at George and Mary.

So passed Christmas day at Northcote Farm.

Let us now shift the scene some 200 miles north. We find ourselves before an old country mansion approached by a drive, bordered by stately elms, and surrounded by several acres of lawn and garden.

The house is old-fashioned and roomy, and was originally Elizabethan in character; but additional

building has modified the style of architecture, which has had to give way to the convenience of the occupants.

This is the home of the Armstrongs, who for many generations have occupied it. It is situated in the parish of Driffild, at the northern extremity of the county of York.

We enter through a spacious porch into a more spacious hall, where a huge fire is burning, and there are stag antlers and other trophies of the chase on the walls. Stuffed birds are also to be seen in cases, and the whole seems to indicate that forbears of the Armstrongs have been both huntsmen and sportsmen.

At this moment the dinner gong sounds, the clock is striking six, so let us enter with the diners, and take a survey of the company.

The dining-room is an apartment of ample proportions. A great yule log is blazing in the old-fashioned fireplace, roaring up the chimney, and sending up myriads of sparks in a true Christmas fashion. Three large bay windows on one side admit light during the day, and they are surmounted by handsome cornices bearing dark plush curtains. The floor is of polished oak, handsomely inlaid, before the fireplace is a tiger skin, and a Turkey carpet occupies the centre.

The furniture is of dark mahogany of a massive character, and upholstered in maroon-coloured morocco. The whole is lighted by two large brass candelabra, which hang over the middle of the table, the wax candles of which throw down on the plate and glass below a mellow light, just enough to show clearly the good things to be consumed, and to add a pleasing sparkle to the wine, as it dances merrily in the glasses.

Let us take a glance at the assembled company.

That hearty old gentleman is Dr John Armstrong the

elder. His face is beaming, and he has taken his place at the far end of the table. On his right hand sit Dr and Mrs Dawson, while facing them is Alice, her father's housekeeper, and close to her—yes, very close—her betrothed, Charley Dawson. Next to Mrs Dawson is Edith, and by Edith's side, John.

The latter does not look well. He has been complaining of headache, his face is flushed, and he has little appetite for dinner.

John's father gave a short grace. He then said, 'My dear friends, you are very welcome; this is not the first time we have spent the festive season together, and I trust it will not be the last.'

'John, my boy,' said Dr Armstrong presently, 'you're not getting on with your dinner.'

'No,' said Edith, 'he has scarcely eaten anything. I'm sure he's not well.'

'There, John, you hear what Dr Edith says,' and Charley put on an air of great solemnity. 'Let her prescribe for you. By-the-bye, old man, I hope you're not moping about that pretty girl whose ankle you cured so nicely, for I tell you, you're out of it—yes, out of it altogether.'

Edith could not help showing annoyance at this allusion to Mary Elliot, and John flushed angrily as he looked at the speaker.

Dr Dawson glanced suspiciously at John, and then turned to his son, and asked :—

'What do you mean, Charley?'

'I only mean,' was the reply, 'that Miss Mary Elliot, a young lady of our acquaintance in Norwich, is engaged to be married to a handsome young fellow of the name of 'Burrows.'

'What had *you* to do with this Miss Elliot, Charley?' said Alice, with some severity.

'Oh, I? Nothing at all—I never poach on John's preserves.'

'Well, Charley,' said his mother, 'you seem to know all about this engagement, while John apparently does not, so Alice had better make further inquiries.'

'Well, the truth is, mother, I went over to visit a friend—one of our articled clerks—a few days ago at Fritton, and I heard quite a romantic story about this lady. She has been the talk of the town.'

Dr Dawson thought he could quite understand that. John leaned forward anxiously, and said, 'What has happened, Charley?'

'It appears,' continued the latter, 'that when the frost set in, and before the ice was strong enough, this young lady ventured on, and was skating about to the admiration of all beholders, when, lo! on a sudden, the ice gave way, and in she went!'

'How very dreadful!' exclaimed the ladies in a breath; and Edith noticed John was deeply interested.

'Yes,' said Charley, 'in she went, and she wouldn't have come out again—that is, alive—if a love-sick swain, who had dogged her steps all the afternoon, had not pluckily gone to the rescue and pulled her out. The whole village rings with his praises, and a few days after the exploit the gallant youth received as the reward of his service a promise of the lady's hand. Now, Alice, is not this a nice little bit of romance? Doesn't our wooing seem tame after it?'

'I'm very glad,' replied Alice, laughing, 'to be without such romance. I shouldn't think it pleasant to be nearly drowned, and you know, Charley, perhaps you wouldn't have succeeded in pulling me out.'

'It's a good thing,' said Dr Dawson to the elder Dr Armstrong, 'the girl is likely to be settled. From what I heard at Norwich she seemed a little unsteady.'

The colour mounted to John's face as Dr Dawson made this remark and looked in his direction, but he said nothing.

John's father now proposed the health of the young couple, soon to be made one (for the marriage had been arranged to take place early in the spring).

'Ah, Charley, I cannot help regarding you somewhat in the light of a robber. What am I to do when you have taken away Alice? An old man of over threescore will not have a soul to look after him.'

'Make John take a wife and come here,' was the prompt reply, 'and a very nice thing he'll have too. Think of the suburban villa that Alice and I will be reduced to, and compare it with this lovely spot. Some men don't know when they are well off.'

'You hear, John?' said his father.

John gave a forced smile, and tried to change the subject.

'He might do worse from a business point,' said his father to Dr Dawson.

'It seems to me,' replied the other, 'this is just the place for John.'

After dinner they retired to the drawing-room, where Alice and Edith played duets. Then Alice and Charley tried part songs, while Dr and Mrs Dawson and the Armstrongs sat down to a rubber at whist.

Early in the evening, however, Dr Armstrong insisted on his son going to bed, he was so evidently unwell.

'I don't like his look to-night, John,' said Dr Dawson to his old crony, when the young man had retired, 'he is feverish, and has been far from well all day.'

'Let us hope it is only a cold,' was the reply, 'and that he will be better to-morrow.'

CHAPTER VII

JOHN'S ILLNESS

'O woman, in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please :
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou.'

THE next morning John was far too unwell to rise, and when the party assembled at breakfast, there was a gloom upon all on account of the unforeseen entrance of sickness into the family.

The early period of every illness is always one of grave anxiety, especially when its nature is not altogether known. For who can say what terrible malady may not be at hand, or whether the patient may, or may not, be able to bear up against the disease?

The meal passed off almost in silence, and even the irrepressible spirit of Charley was damped.

'This is a disappointment, Alice, isn't it?' he whispered. 'How very unreasonable of John to choose such a time to be ill!'

After breakfast John's father and Dr Dawson had a consultation, and came to the conclusion that the symptoms pointed to typhoid fever.

'How could he have caught it?' said the latter. 'He

must have sickened at Norwich. There were two or three cases in the hospital there, I remember.'

'It may have been so,' replied the other, 'but how often it happens, Dawson, that it is impossible to say with any certainty where this disease is contracted. Sometimes our drains may be at fault, or an improper waste pipe to our bath-room may poison the whole household; in other cases the use of infected drinking water may generate the disease. But both you and I have seen many a case in which the outbreak could not be attributed to any of these causes.'

The party did not separate till after the New Year, but it was then thought advisable the Dawsons should return home.

John now was delirious, and scarcely knew any one. At times he would recognise his father and his sister, but it was evident he was smitten very severely.

A trained nurse had been procured, but Alice and Edith shared in the nursing; the latter, indeed, displayed such skill and ability that Dr Armstrong could not help showing his regret when the time drew near for the departure of the Dawsons.

Dr Dawson saw this, and after consulting with his wife and Edith, kindly told his old friend that if he thought it would advantage his son, Edith might remain. In fact, she was quite anxious to do so, if she could be of any good.

Dr Armstrong thankfully accepted the offer.

'It is very kind of you,' he said. 'You see Alice is not of much use in a sick-room, but Edith, upon my word, seems born for a nurse.'

'My only anxiety is, lest she should take the disease.'

'She might do so at Norwich,' replied her father. 'You know, Armstrong, we don't believe much in the contagious character of typhoid, if proper precaution

are taken, and I am sure there is no fear of omission in this respect in your house.'

So it was settled that Edith should remain, and take her share of nursing, when the regular nurse was off duty.

For several weeks John hovered between life and death, and like a guardian angel Edith watched over him, taking her turn, and noting every change with a keenness and accuracy, which far excelled the power of observation of her trained assistant: and Dr Armstrong soon began to rely more and more on Edith's report, and to congratulate himself on his good fortune in being able to secure such valuable services for his son.

About the end of the third week of the illness it was evident that a climax was being reached, and that the patient could not become much worse.

To the eye of the father it was but too clear that a few days more would show whether his son would live or die. Every one in the house went about with bated breath, and the faces of the watchers showed clearly their anxiety.

It was at this time that Dr Armstrong, visiting his son about eight o'clock one evening, found Edith sitting before the patient's bed in great distress, and her pallid face and trembling hands showed all the signs of imminent exhaustion.

'My child,' said the doctor, 'this will never do. You must go to bed at once. You are not in a fit state to watch another hour.'

'Is he going to die, Dr Armstrong?' she said. 'Is he going to die?' and the tears coursed down her cheeks.

The doctor gazed long and steadily at his son, felt his pulse, noted his temperature and respirations.

'There is hope yet, Edith, but you must go to bed,

and I will take your place till nurse relieves me. I will be sure to let you know of any change, my child, he added, noticing her wistful look of anxiety.

'Thank you, thank you,' she said, as she pressed the doctor's hand, and silently left the room.

'Ah,' he muttered, when he found himself alone, 'to-night will clear the matter. How that dear girl loves him, and he has always been so cold and impassive towards her. Surely, if he gets well, and hears of her noble devotion, he will have some gratitude. And he *shall* hear of it'—looking towards the bed—'if he lives.'

The patient was very restless, and his face covered with perspiration. Ever and anon he muttered incoherent words. Once or twice his father distinctly heard the name 'Mary' pronounced.

He started. 'Surely,' he thought, 'there can be nothing between him and that girl Charley was alluding to on Christmas day. I hope Edith has not heard him mention that name.'

He wiped his son's face with a handkerchief, moistened his lips, and placed a small piece of ice in his mouth. Then he renewed the cold compress to his head.

He next took out his thermometer, and proceeded to take the temperature.

'It is falling,' he said a few minutes later, on looking at the register, 'and the pulse still holds. He will pull through, thank God,' and the old man tottered to a chair, and sank down almost overcome by his feelings.

An hour later he administered a stimulant with some liquid food, and the patient sank into a calm sleep, such as had not been since the commencement of the illness.

When, shortly after, the nurse relieved the father, he pointed out to her the favourable change, and left the room with an unutterable feeling of relief. Passing by

Edith's room he knocked at the door, which was immediately opened by that lady, who had evidently made no attempt to go to bed.

'All is well, Edith,' he said joyfully, 'the change has come. John will get well.'

He smiled as he saw the happy look in Edith's eyes, and added, 'Now child, go to bed at once—go to bed—we don't want another patient on our hands.'

Dr Armstrong was right. The change had come.

From that night John steadily improved, but his convalescence was slow, showing how the virulence of the fever had undermined his constitution. Three weeks later he was only able to sit up for short intervals, and he looked no more than the wreck of his former strength.

During convalescence, he could not help noticing Edith's tender solicitude for his welfare, the thousand and one little things which showed clearly enough the cause of all this care, and drew his attention to the fact that such a devotion in a woman could be the outcome of but one influence.

He now, for the first time, felt that there could be no doubt he was loved by Edith.

On one memorable morning when his convalescence was advanced, and he was beginning to get about between two or three rooms,—March was now half through, and in April the marriage of his sister and Charley was to take place,—his father came into the room where he was sitting with Edith and Alice, who were discussing the wedding. On his entrance, Alice exclaimed, 'Now, Edith, father is going to talk to John, so you need not mind leaving him, and come and have a look at those new dresses. I very much want you to give me your opinion, for I'm not satisfied.'

'Oh, yes,' laughed John, 'do go! For goodness sake don't let Alice remain in suspense about a dress!'

Dr Armstrong sat down by the side of his son, and watched Edith as she left the room. When the door closed, he looked earnestly at his son, and said :—

‘Ah, John, we shall soon have a wedding in the family, how I wish it were going to be a double one.’

John blushed, as he could not help seeing what his father had in his mind.

‘If you had only seen her, my boy,’ he continued, ‘watching over you when you were so ill ; the tenderness, the attention, the affectionate solicitude she displayed ! Could you only appreciate all this ! Could you only have seen her as I did, on the night when your illness took its final turn, you could have little doubt in what direction to seek for a wife !’

‘I assure you, father, I do appreciate Edith’s care. I am deeply grateful, and I think she loves me.’

‘You need have no doubt about it,’ interpolated his father.

‘I also think,’ continued his son, ‘I am exceedingly fond of Edith. I always used to admire her—and—father—if you approve of it—I—I was thinking of asking her to be my wife.’

‘John, you have made me a happy man,’ was the glad reply. ‘It is the one thing I have always desired. You never could find throughout the wide world a better wife than Edith will make you. It’s a pity we can’t have the weddings together.’

At this moment the girls returned.

‘Well, Alice, how about the dress ?’ said her brother. ‘Edith thinks it all right, so I suppose it will have to do.’

‘But, if it’s all right,’ said John, ‘you wouldn’t have it altered, would you ?’

‘Perhaps, when Edith is going to be married, she will be more particular,’ retorted his sister with some asperity.

A day or two later John was sitting in the dining-room reading a newspaper, and Edith was busy over some finery for the wedding.

The former let his paper drop from his hands, and fell into a reverie for a few minutes. Then looking up and noticing that Edith had been observant of it, and was wondering whether he was not so well, he replied to her thoughts :—

‘I’m quite well, Edith, but I was thinking of you.’

His companion blushed.

‘Yes, Edith, I have been thinking that I love you very dearly, and I don’t think I should be alive now, if it had not been for you.’

‘Now, I want to ask a question—a very important one—Charley and Alice are shortly to become one, may I tell my father and your parents, that we have agreed to follow their example? Do you love me well enough for that, Edith?’

‘Yes, John, I do,’ was the reply, ‘I love you more than I can tell you.’ And she came close, and placed her hands in his. ‘But, John,’ she added after a pause, ‘you don’t love me only for nursing you, do you?’ and she looked wistfully into his face. ‘You don’t want to marry me only because you think I saved your life?’

‘Oh no, dear,’ he replied, ‘I don’t mean that. I must have loved you for a long while. You know, I always liked you.’

‘Yes,’ she replied, but a little doubtfully, as she thought of the excursion to Yarmouth.

‘Do you know,’ continued John, ‘I have never thought much about marriage; during my illness I have seen things in another light, and I now feel sure I must have loved you all along.’

Ah! when the poor fever-stricken patient had been unconsciously murmuring the name of ‘Mary’ on and off

through that terrible interval, when life and death battled for his possession, this delirium, though possibly evidence of a certain sort, that he had been in love, hardly proved that Edith had been the object of his affection.

He remembered nothing of this,—all was quite a blank here—and fortunately Edith had not heard the wild words. Had she done so, she would have understood their meaning, and very different might have been her answer on this eventful morning.

But the nurse had listened to them, and so also had John's father, and even now John was deceiving himself, and in reality was no more in love with Edith than Mary Elliot was with George Burrows.

Still he felt—and he was right—that Edith loved him, and that no girl deserved to be loved more devotedly, and that it would be wise to seize the opportunity of gaining so good a wife.

Yes, there was a spice of selfishness that ran through John's mental calculations, and it was more disastrous in reality because it was a selfishness of which he was unconscious. For had he understood he was simply sacrificing Edith for his own welfare, the iniquity of the action would have been palpable; and as he was by no means wanting in all principle, he might have studied Edith's future, and have considered whether it was right to mislead her as to the reality of his love.

There can be no doubt that if Edith had had any reason to suspect the truth of his love, she would never have consented to wed him. But, alas! we all believe only too easily what we wish to believe, and it did not occur to her to question in the least this apparently spontaneous confession.

She simply said, 'Yes, John, I will be your wife, and will try to make you happy,' and in the embrace

that followed, John felt more than ever that the pleasing delusion into which he had fallen was in fact the truth.

Vanity of vanities! How often it happens in the world that shams take the place of reality, that fiction supplants truth. The professing lover is accepted at his own valuation, the true one is not even listened to.

On this same day, many miles distant, Edith's true lover, James Paget, was thinking of her with sadness in his heart.

He had heard of John's illness, and that Edith had stayed at Driffield to nurse him, and with his usual shrewdness had foreseen what had happened.

His one anxiety and only care was for Edith, and he had prayed earnestly that John would really love her; for his greatest fear was lest he should marry her under a false impression that he loved her, and should find out his mistake when too late.

But all was in God's hands. He could do nothing except look on, and when a few days later he learnt of Edith's engagement, he finally made his decision to go abroad with Bishop Jackson.

In the afternoon, John presented Edith to his father. 'Father,' he said, 'all is settled, Edith is going to be my wife.'

'Why couldn't you have come to this understanding quicker, John?' said his sister, who was sitting by her father. 'It will be impossible now for Edith to be married with me, as she is to be my bridesmaid, and I can't possibly get another in time.'

'Never mind, Alice,' said her father with a joyful smile, 'we'll have another wedding before long, and you shall have the pleasure of being at both.'

'Edith,' said Alice, 'I shall be very pleased to have you for a sister. You know I always thought you would be my sister, but, heigh-ho! you and John have been so

long making up your minds that I was beginning to think he would be a confirmed old bachelor.'

Three weeks later, there was great excitement in the ancestral mansion of the Armstrongs; it was the day of Charley and Alice's wedding.

All the Christmas visitors were once again under the old roof. Dr Dawson warmly shook hands with John, and congratulating him on his convalescence, told him he would be glad to have him as a son-in-law.

Edith's mother was also well pleased, and as she kissed her daughter, she exclaimed:—

'I'm so glad everything has happened as we wished, after all. I was getting a little afraid about John. Do you know, I actually heard there was talk about him and a post-office clerk of the name of Elliot. I was sure there couldn't be anything in it.'

Edith paled a little, but said nothing. Whenever this girl was mentioned a cloud came across her happiness. She could not forget seeing her in John's arms, when she had been so maliciously pointed out by Miss Tallboys on the day of the excursion.

It was a fine spring morning, and the whole neighbourhood were out of doors to see the wedding of Dr Armstrong's daughter, who had lived among them all her life, and was deservedly popular.

The sun was shining brightly, and the bells ringing merrily as the cortége drew up at the porch of the parish church.

Inside it was crowded, and the party was met by the old rector, who shook hands warmly with the bride's father, who introduced his son to the rector's notice, and intimated that before long he would require his services to tie another knot.

'Well, doctor,' said the clergyman, 'I'm always ready to serve you. I wish all happiness to the young folks.'

Alice was a trifle nervous, and anxious about her dress, but as every one admired it she grew calmer. Charley was as cool and collected as usual.

'Aren't you ashamed of yourself,' he said with mock solemnity to John, 'to allow your younger brother to go through this ordeal without having first set him the example?'

'Never mind, old man,' replied his friend, 'cheer up, it'll soon be over.'

The marriage service then proceeded, and Alice and Charley became man and wife. The organ peeled forth the wedding march, and amid showers of rice and cheering, the party returned to Dr Armstrong's house for the breakfast.

This repast went off with the greatest success, and after the usual toasts, John, in replying for the 'bridesmaids,' intimated amid cheers, that one of them was shortly about to follow the example so courageously set that morning. Charley and Alice retired to prepare for their journey; and shortly after, amid quite a shower of old shoes, they were seen to gallop along the drive *en route* for the railway station and Scarborough, where the first portion of the honeymoon was to be spent.

On the following day, Dr and Mrs Dawson and their daughter left for Norwich, and John accompanied them to make a stay at their house till he was a little stronger. He then proposed to go to London to prosecute his professional studies at one of the metropolitan hospitals, and to take a survey of the metropolis generally, with all its sights and fascinations, before returning to marry Edith in the autumn.

John was to have plenty of Edith's company, for he was to escort her and her mother to London, where

they would shortly go to make Charley's home ready for the return of the pair from their honeymoon.

A suburban villa of fair size had been taken and furnished at Finchley, and it was determined by mother and daughter that nothing should be omitted to make this home without speck or blemish.

While staying with the Dawsons at Norwich, John revisited his old friends, and everywhere introduced Edith as his future wife ; so that his engagement became generally known, and among others who became aware of it was Emily Elliot, who had returned to her duties at the hospital.

She was not sorry to hear of the engagement, but in writing to her sister at Fritton she did not mention it, as she wished, as far as possible, to keep John's name from her, hoping she might forget all about him.

The Rev. James Paget had not yet resigned his curacy, but was leaving in a few months. He shook hands heartily with John on meeting him, and congratulated him.

'You have got a pearl, Armstrong, a pearl of price, and I trust you will know how to prize it. God has indeed been good to you. Remember me to Miss Edith, and say I trust to see her before I leave Norwich.'

John thanked him, and again remonstrated with him about his going abroad, but the die was cast, and the curate told his friend that nothing could shake his determination in that respect.

After the interview, James Paget became thoughtful. He had misgivings that all was not well, and by some power of intuition he seemed to see into the future. If anything did go wrong affecting Edith, how hard it would be to hear of it in some distant part of the world, where he could render no assistance! 'Does

John really love her?' he asked himself, and the answer in his mind was far from satisfactory.

He had said he would call on Edith, but he did not feel sure it would be well to do so. He would not for the world that she should have any idea of his passion; but he rightly conjectured that she, absorbed in her own affection for John, would not be likely to notice the state of his heart, or to spy out a secret, which in spite of his utmost caution, her mother had more than suspected.

When just before his departure he did call, she received him kindly, and told him how greatly she admired his self-sacrifice, and that she would always remember him as one of her oldest friends.

'Thank you, Miss Edith,' he said, 'it is very good of you, but I want one favour—and see, here is a little Church Service, which I am going to ask you to accept as a memento. If at any time you are in trouble, and I could be of assistance, promise me you will give me that privilege.'

'Thank you, Mr Paget. Yes, indeed I will. But,' she added smiling, 'I hope I am not going to have any trouble.'

'Heaven forbid,' he replied, 'but you have made me happy by your promise.'

He bade her 'adieu,' and as he left, Edith observed him more closely. His kind sympathetic manner had a wonderful attraction, and when he was gone, it seemed as if a true friend had departed.

She took up the Church Service, and opened the fly-leaf, 'Edith Dawson, from her sincere well-wisher, James Paget,' was written in the curate's handwriting.

'I feel sure,' thought Edith, 'that if I wanted a friend, he would be a true one.'

A few days before Charley and Alice were expected

home, Mrs Dawson, Edith, and John went to London. The two former were to stay at the house at Finchley, while John, who had quite recovered his health, was to reside with an old college friend, who practised in a West-end square.

Charley's house was found to be in apple-pie order. The two servants that had been engaged, were all that could be expected, and as there appeared little further to be done in the way of preparation, John told them, jokingly, he must take them to see some of the sights of the town, or they would upset the house in order to have something to do.

Mrs Dawson's health would not allow her to be out at night, so that Edith only could accompany him to the theatre, and other evening entertainments.

On the third day, Charley and Alice arrived home apparently well satisfied with their holiday, and looking the picture of happiness.

'Ah,' said that gentleman, 'it will be your turn next, John, but, do you know, I wish mine had to come over again!'

He said it with a sly glance at his wife, who answered with a smile, and a look of supreme satisfaction—

'I believe you would, Charley, but you know you've got some work to do, you can't always be in idleness.'

'Yes, there's that confounded office!' murmured her husband, 'thank your stars, John, you have nothing to do with an office.'

CHAPTER VIII

JOHN BECOMES A 'LOCUM TENENS'

'How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
Makes ill deeds done.'

AFTER the return of the married couple Mrs Dawson went back to Norwich, but Edith stayed on at her brother's house.

John busied himself during the day at the Medical School of St Barnabas, but in the evening would find his way to Finchley.

As time went by, however, Charley noticed he was not quite so frequent a visitor, and Edith, who saw that her brother was vexed on her account, became uncomfortable, and shortly after returned home.

John had thrown himself again heart and soul into his studies, and diligently attended in the wards of St Barnabas. He was well known to the chief surgeons and physicians of that institution, who gave him every opportunity of pursuing his bent.

The delights of metropolitan practice once more began to attract him, and he thought, with regret, that in a few more months he must leave the great centre of professional education to immure himself in a small country town, and engage in the tiresome routine of general practice.

But, then, as a recompense, there was Edith. At first he was able to get up a sort of enthusiasm on her account, and to imagine that her society would compensate for all such annoyances. By degrees, however, the glamour faded from the pleasant picture, and the future seemed more and more distasteful.

He still pretended that he was in love with Edith, but occasionally his mind reverted to Mary Elliot, and he wondered if she ever thought of him now. He even felt tempted to go down to Fritton, but his better feelings prevailed, and he acknowledged that such a step would be unjustifiable. What a scandal, too, would arise, if by any chance Emily Elliot were to know of it, and what would Edith think, if it came to her ears.

About the middle of June, John had occasion to run down to Norwich. He had got a small portmanteau with necessary luggage, and intended to ask Dr Dawson to let him stay with him for a few days.

As he stepped out on the platform he was accosted in well known tones :—

‘What! Is it you, Armstrong? You are the very man sent by Providence at my direst need.’

The speaker was Dr Ling, an old friend, known to John for many years, who was in practice at Fritton.

‘How can I serve you, my dear fellow?’ said John. ‘It’s an age since I saw you last!’

‘Come and have some dinner at the hotel, Armstrong, I must catch the express at 6.30, and it is just five o’clock.’

John acceded, and the two were soon sitting face to face at one of the tables in the grill room of the Great Eastern Railway Hotel.

‘Look here, Armstrong,’ said his friend, ‘I’m in a fix, and I want you to help me! I’ve had a telegram to go

to Edinburgh at once. My father has had an apoplectic seizure, and is reported to be dying. I have wired to Crocker and all the other medical agents, and find I cannot get a *locum tenens* for love or money—at least for a day or two. There has been a rush upon them lately on account of the Medical Congress at Paris, which has taken away so many English practitioners. Now, could you, my dear fellow, just take my place for a day or two? You won't be overworked, as there is but little doing; only one or two important cases that want looking after.' He glanced anxiously at John, who replied:—

'Well, Ling, I didn't expect this, but you do seem in a fix, so I'll do what I can.'

'You always were a trump, Armstrong,' said the other joyfully. 'I can't tell you how much obliged I am! Now, there's a train at 7.30 to Fritton, and I told my groom to meet it with the gig, as I hoped to be able to send some one back. He will drive you and your luggage to my house, and I'm sure Mrs Ling will make you comfortable.'

'There are only two patients of importance I need mention. One, Sir James Scrope of Fritton Manor, who has recently hurt his knee by a fall from his horse; he will require to be seen every day,—not that there's much the matter with the knee, but the baronet is a nervous patient. The other is one of the daughters of Farmer Rokeby, who is bad with pneumonia. Beyond these two you will not have to make half-a-dozen visits a day, and there's good fishing in the broad.'

'By the way,' said John, 'Farmer Elliot is a neighbour of yours, is he not?'

'Yes, and he is one of my patients, that is, when he is ill, which is not often. But I attended his wife when she died. He has got a pretty daughter, Mary, who is engaged to be married to another patient of mine, Mr Burrows. You will very likely

run across her, for she's very thick with Agnes Rokeby—it is Kate who is ill—and I often see her at the farm when I make my visits. But how do you know anything about the Elliots?'

'One of the girls is a nurse here at the hospital,' was the reply.

'Yes, I remember now, that's Emily.'

Dinner had been served, and the two did ample justice to it, and in asking questions about mutual friends who had been lost sight of, and in recalling episodes of the past, the time soon slipped away.

When the clock struck six, Dr Ling rose and said it would be well to make preparations for his journey, as the train was punctual.

The two friends, therefore, lighting cigars sauntered back to the railway station. The express started exactly at the time.

'I shall never forget your kindness, Armstrong,' cried Dr Ling, waving his hand to John as the train glided from the platform.

When the express had gone, John thought of the fresh responsibility he had incurred.

In an hour the train for Fritton would start, what should he do in the meanwhile?

He had not written to Edith, so the Dawsons were not aware of his presence at Norwich, but he might have been observed since his arrival by some one who had recognised him, and might mention it to one of the family: so would it not be better to run round to the house and explain matters, and thus avoid the risk of a misunderstanding?

This seemed the more straightforward course to adopt, and he was about to call a cab, when the thought of Mary Elliot occurred to his mind.

The Dawsons knew she was living at Fritton. Edith

was well aware of it, and had she not been a little jealous already?

Surely it would be better to go straight to Dr Ling's house—he had less than an hour to spare! On his return he might easily call and tell Edith where he had been: and as then he would have left the district, she would never trouble about the few days he had spent there.

Such reasoning showed only too clearly the danger of the step he was taking. Had he calmly analysed his feelings, he must have confessed that in going where he might see Mary Elliot, he was approaching dangerously near to a fire, which might burn him. That he was wrong, was equally shown by the necessity he felt of keeping it a secret from the lady he was engaged to marry.

Had there been no shadow of guilt, nothing of which he need have been in the least degree ashamed, there can be little doubt he would have followed his first impulse, and at all risks have made a call at the Dawson's.

How often does it happen that the most important events of our life depend upon trifles! However insignificant the business we may have in hand, we can never be sure that the greatest issues of our life may not be more or less involved in it.

Little did John dream what were to be the consequences of this little episode in his life, this kindly obliging of an old friend. Dr Ling had said he would never forget his kindness, alas! it was fated that John himself would never forget it. By taking this step, owing to his weakness of moral principle, he was in reality laying the foundation of all the sin and crime that was to follow.

There was in his mind then not the slightest foreshadowing of it. If he had had the vaguest presenti-

ment of what was about to be, he would have shrunk away with horror, and hurried from Fritton. But he did know that he was in a measure treading the crooked path of deception, and when a man does this knowingly, he must take the consequences. His blood will be upon his own head.

As the Fritton train left the Norwich station, the Rev. James Paget hurried along the platform. He was desirous of going a few miles up the line to a local station, where this train stopped, but had been delayed, and was now too late, for the guard would not let him enter the train as it was in motion.

As it swept by, glancing into one of the carriages he thought he recognised the features of Dr Armstrong.

'I did not know Armstrong had been in Norwich lately,' he said to himself. 'Dr Dawson told me he was in London, and did not seem to expect him. What a nuisance to have lost this train, I shall have to wait half-an-hour!'

When John reached Fritton he found the gig waiting. It was a lovely summer's evening, and he enjoyed the drive through the quiet country lanes fringed with hedges sweet with May and wild roses. It was a beautiful sunset, and the west was all aglow with its dying glories as he reached his friend's house.

Mrs Ling hospitably received him, and expressed great satisfaction that her husband had been able to get so good a *locum*. 'We really did not know what to do, Dr Armstrong,' she said, 'and my husband could never have dreamt of meeting you.'

On the day following John's arrival at Fritton, Farmer Elliot and Mary were sitting at middle day dinner at Northcote Farm. 'Are ye going, lass,' said the former, 'to see Agnes Rokeby this afternoon? I hear Kate is worse, and Dr Ling, he's had to go to Edinburgh as his

father's a-dyin', so mayhap the poor thing won't have a doctor.'

'Oh yes, father,' replied Mary, 'Dr Ling will be sure to get a doctor from Norwich to take his place. I shall be calling this afternoon, and shall then hear all about it, for Agnes is going to London to-morrow. Her situation won't wait, so she's bound to go although poor Kate is so bad.'

At supper, Farmer Elliot again returned to the same subject.

'Well, lass, how's Kate Rokeby? Whose the new doctor in Ling's place?'

Mary started, and seemed disconcerted. 'Kate's better, father, much better.'

'I'm glad of that,' said her father, 'but how about the doctor?'

'Yes, they have one,' abruptly replied Mary.

'Don't ye know his name, lass? What sort of a man is he?' and he looked with astonishment at his daughter, who blushed, and seemed so different from usual, that he felt alarmed.

'Ye haven't caught Kate's complaint, have ye, Mary?' he continued after a pause. 'If ye are going to be ill, I don't want any new doctor, I prefer the old un. Ling's a thorough good man. I mind how kind he was to your poor mother.'

'Oh, there's nothing the matter, father,' she cried with an hysterical laugh.

Just then George Burrows entered the room.

'Ye'll hardly believe it, George,' said the farmer, turning to him, 'here's our Mary has been to Rokeby's Farm, and don't know the name of the new doctor who's attending Kate.'

'His name's Armstrong,' replied the latter; 'he used to be the house doctor at the Norwich Hospital, and it

was he who saved old Joe Smith's life after the accident, you remember. He's a clever un, farmer.'

'Oh, Dr Armstrong, is it,' said the farmer thoughtfully, 'there never were such a doctor, according to Joe, and now I think I've heard Emily speak of him.'

This last remark of her father's still more upset Mary. Had Emily told her father about her previous acquaintance with John? She grew pale with the thought, and trembled all over.

'What is the matter, Mary?' said George, suddenly looking fixedly at her.

'I'm sure she's not well,' said her father, again turning his attention to her.

Mary was in fact in a state of strange trepidation. She had been much startled by meeting John, and had felt all the old fascination revive in his presence. It happened that her friend Agnes was not at home, having gone out to see about some things she required to take with her to London the next day, and Mrs Rokeby had been entirely occupied with her sick daughter, so that Mary was quite *tête-à-tête* with John in the parlour: and when he left the farm, as he was walking, he went a good part of the way home with her.

Their path lay through fields and woodland, and was very solitary, so that it afforded abundant opportunity of continuing the old flirtation. She did not know of John's engagement, but felt her own conscience rebuke her on account of George, while John saw only too clearly his self-deception, and the worthlessness of his recent protestations to Edith.

And now, when Mary felt the eyes of her betrothed husband, and those of her father looking steadily at her, she trembled, ignorant of what knowledge the latter might have of the past.

It, perhaps, might have been better if Emily had told her father what had occurred at Norwich. Possibly in that case the ruin fast approaching might have been averted; but she had reckoned on honour where honour, alas! was not, and respecting her sister's wishes, had buried in her bosom the knowledge of the past indiscretion.

Mary saw that both her lover and father were getting anxious, and tried to stay her agitation, and to put on a forced calmness. Her one desire was to escape to the privacy of her room.

'I'm quite well, father, indeed I am,' she said, in answer to the anxious inquiries, 'but I've got such a headache, my head seems to be going round. If you don't mind, I think I should like to go to bed. I shall be all right to-morrow.'

'I'm sure you're not well, Mary,' said George; 'let me run round for Dr Armstrong?'

'No, no, no! Don't be foolish, George!—Good night!' and bidding her father good night, and kissing him, she hurried from the room.

'She might have given me a kiss too,' said George ruefully, as the door closed behind her.

'Never mind,' replied her father, 'the lass is not herself to-night.'

During the next three days a fatal attraction drew Mary to farmer Rokeby's house, nominally to inquire after Kate, but in reality to meet Kate's doctor.

Fortune favoured them, for curiously none of the villagers witnessed these meetings, and the two passed a brief period in the proverbial fools' paradise, from which there was to be so bitter an awakening.

On the evening of the third day, as John slowly took his way across the fields, he was a changed man. His face was flushed, his pulse beating violently, and he sat

down on a stile to compose himself as he drew near to the high road.

He realised for the first time the difference the last few days had made in his life, what a leap he had taken since that day week, and in what direction. He felt he could no longer be considered honourable, even as the morality of the world goes. He could not now retrace his way, he must follow it, though it led to perdition. The downward path had indeed been easy, but there was no turning back now.

On arriving at the surgery he found Mrs Ling in conversation with a dapper little man of about thirty-five years of age, with dark hair and closely-shaven face.

'Let me introduce you, Dr Armstrong,' she said, 'to Dr Benson, who has come to relieve you. I have just had a letter from my husband, who tells me his father is better, and he specially asks me to thank you for being a friend in need.'

'You are very welcome to my services,' he answered, shaking hands with the new comer; but he could not help thinking with some bitterness what had been the consequences of obliging his friend, although he could blame no one but himself.

'I suppose you will be returning to Norwich?' said Mrs Ling.

'No, I think of running up to town.'

He felt quite unable to face Edith and the Dawsons.

'At a quarter to ten that evening he arrived at Liverpool Street Station after an absence of four days from the metropolis, but how different everything seemed!

Reckoned by time the interval was short, but what an epoch it seemed when he considered his mental state then and now. His heart sank when he thought of the future: he must marry Edith, carry on the deception, and with all the anxiety that it involved,

what great professional work was he likely to do? What were to become of the dreams of his youth? Would it not be better to break off the engagement with Edith? No! How could he face—if he did so—his father and the Dawsons?

He hailed a cab, and drove to the 'Clarendon,' where he usually stayed when in London, and at an early hour retired to rest, but not, for a long time, to sleep. When at length sleep did come, it was constantly disturbed by dreams in which the phantasms of Mary, Edith, and his father, seemed to be bitterly reproaching him.

On the day after John's departure Mary came as usual to the farmhouse, and waited to intercept the doctor, as she had done the last two days on his departure from the house.

She took her station a short distance up the lane that led from the garden, just round a bend where she could not be seen from the house, and when she saw him turn the corner she hurried forward, but suddenly drew back in surprise.

It was not John, but a stranger.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, 'I thought you were Dr Armstrong.'

Dr Benson raised his hat and bowed.

'Dr Armstrong left for London last night, can I be of any service to you? I am now doing Dr Ling's work.'

She thanked him, but was wishing herself miles away, and as soon as she could, hurried home with a heart heavy as lead.

'She was surprised to see me,' thought Dr Benson. 'I imagine she would have preferred to see Dr Armstrong.'

When Mary reached the farmhouse only Betsy was

in, every one else being out at work. She went into her bedroom, sat down and wept bitterly.

So he had gone away, fled without a word, and she was left alone. In a few months she must marry George. She shuddered. Ought she to marry George? What if she told Emily?

But she dreaded her sister's severity, and felt sure Emily would tell her father. No, she must try and bear it somehow, and hope things would come right.

From about this time a change began to be perceptible in Mary, and although no one at Fritton associated it with the coming of Dr Armstrong, as his stay in the village had been too short to excite attention, none the less the change soon became obvious to her friends.

All her childish, playful, manner seemed to have left her. She was terribly in earnest about everything, and increasingly nervous, as if fearing an impending danger. She aroused her father several times at night by screaming aloud, as if under the influence of great fright.

Both her father and George became alarmed, and the former consulted Dr Ling. He could make nothing of her case, but advised that her marriage should be hastened as much as possible, in order to distract her thoughts.

Strange, however, as it seemed then, it was this proposal that Mary most strenuously resisted, much to George's sorrow.

'You promised to marry me,' he said, 'this autumn. Are you going to break your word?'

'It's barely August yet,' was her reply. 'Please, George, don't worry me, I will marry you by-and-bye.'

Finally, she agreed that the marriage should take place in the last week of September.

As August went by Mary became worse, and the neighbourhood marvelled at the change, and could

scarcely believe that the pallid downcast girl, who always seemed to have been weeping, shunned the company of her old friends, and was never known to smile, was the Mary of their old acquaintance.

One morning Emily Elliot received a letter from her father. It was unusual for him to write, as he was not a good correspondent. She therefore opened it hurriedly, fearing bad news.

‘My dear Emily,’ her father wrote, ‘I wish you could come home for a spell. There’s something wrong with Mary that puzzles us all. Dr Ling can’t understand it, and poor George, he’s dreadful anxious. She’s always moping and crying. She didn’t come home yesterday evening after going for a walk, and when we went to look for her, George found her asleep in Everton Wood. She wouldn’t say anything when we asked questions, only shivered, and looked so bad. The wedding ’ll be in a few weeks now, so if you could get leave of absence from the hospital and come home, I should be most thankful, as ye are the most like person to understand Mary. The crops and the stock promise well this year, so I hope to give George and Mary something to begin housekeeping on.—Your loving father, Thomas Elliot.’

‘What can be the matter with Mary?’ thought Emily, much troubled by her father’s letter. ‘I must speak to the matron, and see Dr Dawson at once.’

She hastened away to do so, and, while passing along the hospital corridor, suddenly met Mr Paget, who had been on a visit to the chaplain.

He recognised her, and stopped for a minute to speak to her.

‘Nurse Elliot,’ he said, ‘I am going to do duty at Fritton for a few weeks, while the rector takes his holiday. I believe your father and sister are his parishioners. Have you any message to send?’

'Thank you, Mr Paget,' Emily replied, 'I've just heard from home. Father wants me to return at once on Mary's account, as she isn't well. Do you know, sir, she continued, 'Mary has become so altered that all at home are alarmed! She was to have been married at the end of the month. Would you mind seeing her when you are at Fritton, as you used to know her so well?'

Mr Paget promised he would do so, and sympathised with her in his usual kindly way, and Emily, thanking him heartily, went to find the matron.

That official saw at once Emily's distress, and being a kind-hearted woman, after reading her father's letter, gave her the leave required.

'I trust, nurse,' she said, 'all will be well. I'm very sorry to hear such a report of your sister. I remember her well, and she seemed light-hearted and happy enough in Norwich.'

The day was Saturday, and it was arranged that Emily should go to Fritton by an early train on Monday morning, and she at once wrote to her father asking to be met at the railway station.

On Sunday at Evensong, when the Rev. James Paget ascended the pulpit at Fritton Church, before beginning his sermon he glanced round at the congregation. Almost immediately below him was the Elliot pew, and he at once recognised Mary, who was sitting between her father and George Burrows.

The clergyman gave an involuntary start when he saw how altered she was. This the laughing and joyous girl he had so often met tripping along the streets of Norwich, whom, though giddy and simple-minded, he had always regarded as the embodiment of youth and innocence?

'There is something gravely wrong,' he thought; 'I

will see her to-morrow. Perhaps I may be able to do some good.'

He preached from the text, 'Come unto Me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' and eloquently dwelt upon the troubles mental and physical, that are the inevitable lot of humanity.

'Some are remediable here,' he said, 'even when the poor sufferer little thinks so. Even the irremediable may be lightened, and it is our duty—yes, our bounden duty—' and he looked towards Mary, who seemed listening intently—'not to give way to affliction, however sorely it may oppress us. Let the sufferer think of others; consider how many thousands in this great world have their crosses to bear. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and if the misfortunes of others do not, indeed, lighten our own, at least they help us to endure them better, and every son or daughter of Eve has always the one divine consolation, which is open to all.'

The Rev. James Paget was an excellent preacher. The little congregation in Fritton Church felt the difference between his discourse and the homilies of the old rector, and when they left the church the merits of the new parson were the staple topic of conversation.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT JOE FOUND IN FRITTON BROAD

‘One more unfortunate,
Weary of breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death.
Lift her up tenderly,
Raise her with care,
Fashioned so slenderly,
Young and so fair.’

‘I cannot take thy hand. There’s blood upon it!’

It was the morning of Monday, September 14th, a fortnight before Mary’s wedding.

At daybreak, Farmer Elliot was aroused by the barking of one of his dogs, and on listening, thought he heard a door shut. At once he got up, and went to the top of the staircase, but as the barking ceased, and everything was still again, he returned to his bed. At this moment he heard the clock strike three.

There was the promise of a lovely autumn day. At first a mist hung over everything, giving a blurred outline to all distant objects, but as the sun made its influence felt the mist disappeared, and the landscape rejoiced in the morning light.

All nature seemed to smile and be glad. The feathered choir in the groves were in full song, the young colts were bounding over the grass and disporting themselves

in playful gambols, and ever and anon the whistle of the farm lads might be heard, as they walked briskly along to commence their daily work.

At six o'clock Joe Smith was crossing Allan's Marsh on his way to Northcote Farm. Allan's Marsh was a considerable piece of pasture land, which abutted on Fritton Broad, and the footpath across it at one portion of its course came to within a few feet of the water, which here was of some depth. The banks of the broad too at this place were fringed with lofty flags and bulrushes.

As Joe walked along he noticed that the flags and rushes were in one spot beaten down, as if some animal had gone into the water. His curiosity was excited, and he approached the margin. Great was his horror, when he saw a little way from the bank a human foot covered by a dainty shoe, just below the surface of the water, entangled in the weeds, which were luxuriant there.

Joe was a man of resources, he did not at once rush off for assistance, but considered the best means of getting the body on shore. There were some trees growing close at hand, and with his clasp knife he quickly cut off a long branch, and trimmed it, leaving a little fork at one end to act as a hook.

Leaning cautiously forward, he was able to insert this hook in the shoe string of the exposed foot, and then he carefully brought the body to land.

More and more horror stricken and dismayed he gradually drew out of the water, and laid upon the grass the body of a young woman, whose features he too surely recognised.

Glazed were the eyes, dripping and dank the long golden tresses, and livid the face, but the old servant of the family felt his heart sink when he found himself looking on the mortal remains of his master's younger daughter.

'Whaat, Miss Mary, it canna' surely be Miss Mary!' he exclaimed in a tone of horror. 'Oh, my poor measter! Whaat will he do, and Mr Burrows! How cam' she here? How got she into the water? Did her fall in? or has her been foully used?' A dark gleam came into his eyes, and he looked carefully round, and examined every inch of the ground.

Everywhere it seemed undisturbed, save where the water plants had been beaten down by the impact of the body.

Stay, what was that under the flags at the very brink of the water, indeed, partly immersed in it? It was paper of some kind.

In an instant he had crawled down to the brink, and seized the letter, for it proved to be such. It was addressed to Miss Mary Elliot at the Fritton post office. As he held it up in his hand a photograph fell from it, and Joe recognised the features.

He seemed in deep thought for a few minutes: then he replaced the photograph in the letter, and carefully put it in his coat pocket.

'Whaat's t' be done with the poor lass?' he said. 'I can't tell her feyther.'

At this moment he saw two farm labourers a little way off. He waved his arms, and whistled loudly to attract their attention. They were soon beside him, and the three tenderly raised Mary's body, and bore it towards Northcote Farm.

Before reaching the farm it was necessary to enter the highway, and to go by the rectory.

It so happened that Mr Paget was up early that morning, and in the garden. He was attracted by what seemed an unusual stir in the road: for those bearing the body had now been joined by half-a-dozen others,

and such an assembly at that time in the morning was not common.

The clergyman went to the gate, and saw at once that a terrible tragedy had taken place. The bearers and crowd stopped when they saw him.

‘What has happened?’ he asked.

‘Joe Smith has pulled Farmer Elliot’s daughter out of the broad,’ said one of the crowd.

The clergyman’s face grew pale, and he leaned against the garden gate.

‘Good God!’ he exclaimed, ‘Mary Elliot in the broad—drowned. God forgive the unhappy girl,’ he muttered to himself. ‘Why did I not see her last night, I noticed how ill she looked, and now it is too late.’

‘Will ye com’ wi’ us, parson, to Farmer Elliot,’ said one of the bearers of the body, ‘for Joe here is afeard to face him? It will be bad for the old farmer.’

‘Yes, it will be a terrible blow,’ he replied. ‘I will go and see what I can do.’

All, then, took their way to Northcote Farm, Mr Paget leading a little distance in front.

When they got near the house one of the men thought he saw the farmer in the yard going to the stables. Mr Paget immediately motioned to the others to keep the body out of sight, while he went forward.

He soon found Mr Elliot, and going up to him, said :—

‘I have something to say to you, farmer, shall we go into the house?’

The latter looked with surprise at the clergyman, and was startled by the tones of his voice.

He immediately led the way to the drawing-room, passing through the parlour, where breakfast was on the table, and Mary’s place ready laid for her.

Mr Paget softly closed the door, and turning to the

other said, 'My dear sir, I am the bearer of terrible news. God has indeed afflicted you, may He in His mercy comfort you in your trouble! The body of your daughter Mary has been found this morning in Fritton Broad by your servant, Joe Smith. No one knows how she came there, but alas!—' Mr Paget paused, and stepped forward, for at this moment the farmer tottered and would have fallen, had not the arm of the clergyman supported him.

He sank into a chair, ghastly pale, and for a minute or two unable to speak. Then after an interval he muttered hoarsely, 'Mary dead—Mary drowned?' After a time he seemed to grasp the sad import of what had happened, and starting up, exclaimed in broken accents, 'What have they done with the body—where is my little lass?' and he would have gone out of the room.

Mr Paget gently restrained him, saying, 'They are taking her up into her bedroom.'

A scream resounded through the house. It came from Betsy, who had just met the sad procession on the threshold.

Mr Elliot now fairly broke down, and sobbed aloud. 'I must see her,' he said between sobs.

'Wait, my dear sir,' replied the other with deep compassion, 'till they have left her in her room.'

They heard the sound of footsteps descending the staircase, and Betsy came hurriedly into the room, sobbing, 'Oh, master—master—poor Miss Mary!'

Mr Paget asked her to compose herself for her master's sake, and, giving the old man his arm, gently led him towards the stairs, and so up to the bedroom, opening the door of Mary's room for him. They entered, and the farmer knelt down before the bed, seized his daughter's cold hands, and sobbing again, exclaimed:—
'Thank God, her mother never lived to see this.'

Mr Paget silently quitted the room, thinking it might be better to leave him there for a time by himself, till the first violence of his grief had abated.

When he reached the hall there was George Burrows, pale as death, the tears streaming from his eyes. He had hurried round on hearing a rumour of what had occurred.

'Mary is dead, they say, parson. How was she drowned? Don't say she drowned herself!' he added imploringly.

'Bear up, Mr Burrows, bear up like a man,' said Mr Paget. 'Think of her father, who is just above by the side of the body. If you can compose yourself, go up and try and comfort him; but, as you are, you would only make him worse.'

Mr Paget then left, promising to return, and George by a strong effort after a time was able to control his emotion. He then went upstairs, and knocked at the bedroom door, and when he got no answer, softly opened it and entered, and bent reverentially over Mary's body, sympathetically pressing the hand of her father, who was sitting by the bedside, silent and motionless, seeming to take no notice of anything.

At 10.30 in the forenoon of that day, Emily arrived at Fritton station. To her surprise no one was waiting, and she wondered greatly at her father's forgetfulness, for he had never forgotten her before.

It was clear, however, there was no one there from the farm, so, arranging for her luggage to be sent, she determined to walk on.

As she went down the road she was much surprised at the public attention she was exciting; for she was well known to many, and her sister's sad fate was now the talk of the village. One or two personal friends also

glanced sadly at her, and passed by without saying a word of greeting.

Mr Paget caught sight of her as she was passing the rectory, and hurried out. He took her inside the house, and there in the rector's study, Emily sat pale and breathless, every now and again showing by half suppressed sobs the mental anguish she was suffering while Mr Paget detailed the sad event of the morning.

'Your manifest duty, Emily, now, is toward your father,' he said, when he had finished. 'I tremble to think what may be the result of this shock, and you must never think of returning to the hospital.'

After a time Emily recovered her composure, and bravely determined to do her duty.

Rising to leave, she asked, 'What do you think of it all, Mr Paget? If my poor sister died by her own hand, what made her destroy herself? Could she have had any trouble?'

'Who knows,' he replied, 'what trouble the poor girl had. I'm afraid there's more behind, which the inquest will bring to light: so that it is doubly necessary that both you and your father should be prepared for the worst.'

'Inquest? and worst? Mr Paget, what could be worse?' sobbed Emily.

The latter shook his head. 'Never mind, Emily, let us wait. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. You do your best to support your poor father, and God will help you all.'

Emily proved a godsend at Northcote Farm. There can be little doubt that but for her presence her father must have died, or have lost his reason.

Emily, during the whole of the bitter time, scarcely ever left him, and by her unremitting attention, and devoted

affection was able to withdraw his mind a little from his great affliction.

Mr Paget called frequently, and pointed out clearly his duty as a Christian. 'You have,' he said, 'one daughter still of whom you may indeed be proud; for if ever daughter showed true courage, and, buoyed up by a true sense of religious duty and filial affection, endeavoured to do her best under the most distressing circumstances, Emily has done so: and her behaviour throughout the whole of this trying time has been the admiration of your neighbours.'

'I do thank God for Emily,' replied the farmer, 'and confess that she is far more worthy than the poor lass I have lost: but, parson, ye know, it oft happens that we poor sinners put our affections on the frailer and weaker vessels. Mary, too, was my dead wife's pet, and if this had chanced during her life, it would have killed her, yes! it would have killed her!'

Mary Elliot's death caused great sensation through the country, and an account of the circumstances attending it appeared in many of the papers.

The inquest was held on Thursday, and it was only after that inquiry had taken place, that the full extent of Mary's distress became known.

Farmer Elliot, Emily, Joe Smith, George Burrows and Dr Ling, had been summoned as witnesses, and Mr Paget, and many others of the neighbours were present, so that the room was crowded.

Mr Fisk, a well known local solicitor, and coroner for that division of the county, on taking his seat remarked that the inquiry was a serious one, but he sincerely hoped that, whatever evidence might be given, there would be no unseemly manifestation of popular feeling, if only to spare the relatives of the deceased, who were deservedly respected.

The jury were sworn, twelve honest Suffolk yeomen, all well known to the Elliots.

'Oyez—Oyez—' said the constable, 'you men of this county are this day summoned on behalf of our sovereign lady the Queen, to say how, or by what means, Mary Elliot came to her death, and a true and impartial verdict give according to the evidence, so help you God.'

The names were then called, and the jury being duly sworn, chose John Hobson, a substantial farmer, as their foreman.

The first witness was Joe Smith. He spoke to the finding of the body.

'You were crossing Allan's Marsh on the way to your work,' said the coroner, 'and were passing near the broad. What made you go down to the edge of the water?'

'I see all the flags and rushes broke down loike, and thought a sheep maybe had got drowned there.'

'When you came to the water did you see the deceased's foot, and drag the body on shore?'

'I did, yer honour.'

'What time was this?'

'About a half after six.'

'Was there any mark of violence on the body, or did you see anything remarkable about the ground where she went in?'

Joe coloured a little, and thought of the letter, but with some hesitation he answered:—

'No, I see no mark of violence, and the ground was quite natural loike.'

'What are you frightened about, my man?' said the coroner, noticing Joe's embarrassment. 'We shan't hurt you. I suppose that's all you can tell us. You can go.'

Joe wanted no second bidding, but was off at once, very glad to get away, for his conscience was uneasy on the score of the letter he had concealed.

The next witness was Mr Elliot.

‘Mr Elliot,’ said the coroner, noticing the painful condition of the old man, ‘we all sympathise with you, but it is necessary to ask a few questions, then you can leave the court and go home.’

The farmer bowed his head.

‘When did you see your daughter alive last?’

‘On Sunday night about 10 o’clock, when she went to bed.’

‘Was there anything peculiar in her mental state then?’

‘She was sad and melancholy like, but no more nor usual for some time past.’

‘For how long?’

‘About two months.’

‘Then from ten o’clock on Sunday night till you saw her dead on Monday morning you neither heard nor saw anything of the deceased?’

‘Yes, maybe I heard her leave the house at three o’clock on Monday morning. I heard my dog bark and thought a door shut, but I didna knaw it was Mary,’ he said with a sob.

‘Was your daughter about to be married?’

‘Yes, the wedding were fixed for next week, and the banns had been put up.’

Every eye was directed towards George Burrows, who was sitting pale as death in one corner of the room.

‘Now, Mr Elliot,’ continued the coroner, ‘were you putting any pressure on your daughter—that is, forcing her to marry against her wish?’

‘Na, I thought she were fond of George—he saved her life—last—year.’

The old man was evidently nearly overcome by emotion. The coroner saw this, and said kindly—

'There, that will do, your daughter had better see you home.'

The constable, however, reminded him that Emily was one of the witnesses, but Mr Paget, who saw the desirability of the old farmer being attended by his daughter, said, 'With all deference, Mr Coroner, I should like to point out that Miss Elliot only arrived at Fritton on Monday morning, some five hours after the body was found. She had not seen her sister for months previously, so that it is not easy to say what she can witness to in this inquiry.'

'You are right, sir,' replied the coroner, 'we will not detain Miss Elliot, she can go home at once with her father.'

Emily felt very thankful to get away from all this bustle and publicity, and as quickly as possible she led her father out of court.

'Now, Dr Ling,' said the coroner after the Elliots had gone, 'will you kindly give us your evidence?'

The doctor was then sworn.

'Were you called to Northcote Farm last Monday to see the body of the deceased?'

'Yes.'

'How long do you consider it had been in the water?'

'Several hours.'

'Did you note any signs of violence about the body?'

'I did not.'

'I believe you have since, by my order, made a *post-mortem* examination of the body: will you tell the jury what you found?'

Dr Ling, turning to the jury, said :—

'Gentlemen, all the internal organs were healthy, and I could find no evidence of disease, but the poor girl was several months gone in pregnancy.'

There was great sensation in court when Dr Ling had finished.

The eyes of all were now on George Burrows, who got up in an excited manner as if to speak, but seemed overcome by his feelings.

The coroner, who had been watching him, then said :—

‘Would you like to be sworn, Mr Burrows, and make a statement to the jury? You were the affianced husband of the deceased. But I leave it entirely to your own choice.’

George saw that a certain suspicion might attach to him, and the thought made a man of him. Rising firmly with compressed lips, and clenched hands, he strode forward and took the book from the officer.

‘Yes, sir, I will be sworn,’ he said, and the oath was accordingly administered.

‘Mr Burrows,’ said the coroner, ‘you were engaged to be married to the deceased. How long had this engagement been going on?’

‘Nearly eight months.’

‘I believe you saved her life last Christmas?’

‘I did.’

‘You have heard the evidence of the doctor. Now, man, before God, are you responsible for the condition of which he speaks?’

‘Before God I am not,’ replied the witness; ‘but if I knew the scoundrel—’ the fire flashed from his eyes, he clenched his fists, and the veins seemed to start from his forehead. The ill-doer might well have dreaded to meet him thus.

‘Mr Burrows,’ said the coroner, ‘that is quite enough. I know of no man in the county whose word is more reliable than yours.’

There was a murmur of approval from those present as the coroner said these words, and the witness replied :—

'Thank you, sir, and thank you, neighbours all.'

George sat down, and buried his face in his hands, but the mystery seemed deeper than ever.

Who was it had wronged Mary? Even rumour was silent! Mary had positively been seen with no one to whom suspicion could attach.

As the court was about to rise, a staid, elderly, woman of about fifty asked to be sworn. She was Mrs Young, the village postmistress.

There was some excitement as the oath was administered.

The coroner asked her what she had to say.

'The deceased has been several times of late to my shop to inquire for letters,' she replied. 'Last Saturday one was received directed to her, which she fetched on that day.'

'What has this letter got to do with us?' asked the coroner testily.

'I thought it strange,' said the witness, 'that Mary Elliot should receive letters in this way, and she so anxious about them, too, as if they had been love letters, and folks thinking she were going to marry Mr Burrows there.'

'I don't think this comes within the scope of our inquiry,' said the coroner, turning to the jury.

'Did you notice the postmark, Mrs Young?' said the foreman.

'Yes, the letter bore the London postmark,' 'it contained also a card of some kind, which I took to be a photograph.'

'This postmistress,' said the coroner with a smile to Mr Paget, 'evidently takes careful note of letters passing through her hands.' Then addressing the jury, he continued:—

'Well, gentlemen, this letter, if we had it, might or

might not throw light on the case, but as no one seems to have seen it save the postmistress and the deceased, it is impossible for us to deal with it. I will, therefore, ask you to give your verdict on the facts. The poor girl was seen alive, and in her usual health on Sunday evening last, and on Monday morning she was pulled out of the broad by Joseph Smith, but how she got into the water, whether she fell in accidentally, or tried to take her own life, there is no evidence to show, though it seems more than likely she was in great distress of mind.'

After a consultation among themselves the jury signified they were of opinion a verdict of 'Found Drowned' would best meet the facts of the case, and after some hesitation the coroner agreed to accept it.

In dismissing the jury he said, 'I have to thank you for the care and attention you have given this case. I am sure we all sympathise with the family of the unfortunate girl, and condemn the villainy of her heartless betrayer. But, gentlemen, his exposure is a matter quite outside our duties. He cannot but be aware of the evil he has done, and if the law cannot touch him, he will at least always be conscious that he has caused the death of one of his fellow-creatures, and brought misery and desolation upon an honest home.'

The same evening the servant at the rectory told Mr Paget that Miss Elliot wished to speak to him. At once he had her shown into the study, where he was sitting.

Emily was in a state of great agitation, and in excited tones exclaimed :—

'Oh, Mr Paget, what is the meaning of this last terrible news about Mary? Who could have ruined her? There seems a dreadful mystery somewhere.'

'Alas!' replied the clergyman, 'I cannot form an opinion. Had your sister any other engagement, or do

you know of anything between Mary and another before her engagement to Mr Burrows?’

‘No,’ she replied, and then hesitated; ‘at least, nothing that could have any bearing upon this.’

‘I don’t think I understand you,’ said Mr Paget.

After a little more hesitation Emily said:—

‘I think, Mr Paget, I ought to tell you everything I know. I was very anxious about Mary last year on account of Dr Armstrong’s attentions to her. He used to call and see her far too often, when he was treating her for the injury to her ankle. I’m sure Mary had a foolish fondness for him, though I constantly warned her. As people began to talk at Norwich, I went to Dr Armstrong and spoke to him.’

‘You did quite right. What did he say?’ anxiously inquired the clergyman.

‘He said he was sorry for what had occurred, and would take care not to compromise her in the future. I think, Mr Paget, he has kept his word, and has not seen her since; for Mary went home then, and he has never been to Fritton.’

Mr Paget had heard a little scandal at the time, but did not think it had gone as far as Emily implied.

‘I think, then,’ he said, ‘we must acquit Dr Armstrong of all suspicion. Had he been down here with Mary he must have been seen, so that it does not seem possible he could have had anything to do with this. Be assured the justice of Heaven will in its own good time find out the evil-doer. I envy not that man’s peace of mind, when the wickedness of his conduct comes home to him; he will not escape God’s avenging angel’s Remorse and Self-reproach.’

After Emily had left the rectory, however, the Rev. James Paget fell into a brown study.

According to Emily, Dr Armstrong had not been to

Fritton since Mary's coming there ; but he felt sure he had seen him, about three months before, sitting in a local train bound thither.

What a terrible thing it would be, if he were the guilty one ! Would it be his duty to inform Edith's parents, if knowledge of the other's guilt were to come to him ?

He had misgivings with regard to John, but he prayed earnestly that if John were the offender, it might never be his lot to bring him to justice.

Then he thought of the possibility of the finding of the letter and photograph spoken of by the postmistress, and he shuddered, for he did not know into whose hands they had fallen.

About a week after the events just recorded, the Dawsons and Armstrongs were once more at Driffeld.

The marriage of John and Edith had been fixed for the following week.

Most of the party were assembled in the drawing-room, the French windows of which faced the lawn ; and as the day was hot, they had been thrown open, and on the lawn outside Charley was playing tennis with his wife and sister.

Inside the room, and sheltered from the sun by an awning, John, his father, and Dr and Mrs Dawson were sitting chatting together. John had the *Times* in his hands, and was glancing over its columns.

'By the way, Armstrong,' said Dr Dawson to John's father, 'did you see that our old lecturer and friend Professor Sylvester is dead ?'

'No,' was the reply, 'but he must have been very old.'

'Yes, eighty-six ;' then turning to his wife—'Don't you remember, dear, the professor having luncheon with us last year ?'

'Very well,' said Mrs Dawson, 'but he was feeble then.'

'I suppose, John,' said Dr Armstrong, turning to his son, 'you haven't had much to do with him?'

John looked up from the newspaper. 'I knew his book very thoroughly when I went up for my degree, but I never heard him lecture.'

Just then, Dr Armstrong was called away by the servant. It proved to be a message, asking him to visit a patient at some distance, and the doctor, who was desirous of introducing his son into his practice, thought this a good opportunity.

He accordingly returned to the drawing-room to find his son, and as he drew near the window, he heard Dr Dawson ask John the distance of Driffild from a certain ruin, which was one of the sights of the country.

John made no answer, and both looked at him in surprise. They were thunderstruck to see the sudden change that had taken place. The paper had fallen from his hands, and he was glaring round with a vacant stare which seemed to recognise no one; his hands were clenched, and there was an ashy pallor about his face. It seemed as if some great terror had suddenly beset him.

Without noticing any one, he got up hurriedly and left the room. No sound had escaped from his lips, so that Mrs Dawson with her eyes bent on her work had seen nothing.

Dr Armstrong followed, but failed to overtake him, for he seized his hat in the hall, and quickly walked away from the house.

His father, therefore, ordered the carriage to be got ready, and invited Dr Dawson to accompany him for the drive. The invitation was accepted, the latter saying it would be just the thing, if his old friend did not

mind a cigar. Dr Armstrong reassured him, observing that a cigar would not shock the propriety of Driffield.

The two were soon driving along the country roads, but, instead of regarding the scenery, were puzzling over the recent incident.

'What could have been the matter with John just now?' said his father. 'Did you notice his face? What does it mean? He is out walking somewhere, I almost think he ought to be followed.'

'It *was* strange,' said the other. 'Do you think he had a sudden pain, violent neuralgia for instance? Has he quite recovered from that attack in the spring?'

'Could it have affected his brain?' said Dr Armstrong in a hoarse whisper. 'Do you know, I think he is altered, he is more moody and apathetic.'

'You mustn't imagine anything of that kind,' said his companion cheerfully. 'There's not the least fear, John's intellect is far too stable. He'll be all right this evening.'

Dr Armstrong's first instruction to his coachman had been to drive to Miller's Cliff. Miller's Cliff was an inland eminence about 200 feet in height, from which a splendid view of the surrounding country could be obtained. It was situated a mile and a half from the doctor's house.

On arrival there they left the carriage and walked near the edge.

'Ah,' said Dr Armstrong, as they shrank back from the abyss, 'one or two people I have known fall over there on to the stones below. It's a terrible fall!'

'Yes,' was the reply, 'it looks a tempting place to commit suicide from.'

The other shivered.

'Do you know, Charles, that two generations back, one

of my family actually jumped down—at least we have believed so. As John is going to marry your daughter, perhaps I ought to tell you the circumstances.'

Dr Dawson looked wonderingly at his friend as he replied, 'Indeed, whatever made your relative do such a foolish thing?'

'Yes,' continued the other, 'it was somewhere about the middle of last century that my great uncle, Robert Armstrong, took that leap. He was a land surveyor and estate agent, and was very well to do. It happened, so I have heard, that on a certain day he had a quarrel with a farmer about a disputed boundary. It did not come to blows, but a bystander said he was pale with rage—looked, perhaps, as John did just now. He then walked rapidly away, and was found a few hours later, lying dead at the foot of this cliff.

'At the inquest a shepherd deposed that he saw him deliberately jump over, but as *felo de se* in those days meant burial at the cross roads, with a stake driven through the body, and as our family was much respected, the jury declined to believe the witness, and charitably brought in a verdict of "accidental death."

'We have, however, always considered that he committed suicide, and was insane. No other member of the family has shown signs of insanity since: but what if this terrible disease, after missing two generations, were to reappear in John? Could typhoid fever, do you think, have lighted up an hereditary tendency?

'You are deeply interested if Edith marries John. I am at least frank, old fellow, for you know what a blow it would be to me, if the marriage were not to take place.'

'My dear John,' replied his friend, 'I am certainly not going to oppose the match on such grounds. Why,

bless my soul! if, when there has been no more insanity in a family than in yours, marriage were forbidden, the world would come to a stop. Your son has no tendency to insanity more than any one else. He will be right enough this evening.'

In the meanwhile, after the two elders had departed, Charley and his opponents became tired of their game, and returned to the drawing-room.

The *Times* was lying on the floor just inside the room, where it had fallen from John's hands. Charley took up the paper, and glanced at it.

The first thing that met his eye at the top of one of the columns in large type was :—

'THE FRITTON TRAGEDY—INQUEST—
RESULT OF POST-MORTEM.'

'Hullo. What's here?' he muttered.

After reading the report he exclaimed :—

'Oh! what a dreadful thing—this Mary Elliot we knew at Norwich has drowned herself.'

'How shocking!' exclaimed the three ladies in a breath.

'It is indeed,' said the young man. 'There is the account, mother, if you would like to look over it'—and he handed her the newspaper—'It has really made me feel so miserable, that I think I'll go and have a cigar in the garden. Where's John?' and for the first time he missed the presence of his friend.

'He went out just before your father and Dr Armstrong,' replied his mother, 'and I haven't seen him since.'

Charley strolled into the garden.

'Poor girl,' he mused, 'who would have expected this? But she was always a flirt. I wonder who the villain is that has seduced her? That letter from London looks

queer : but Mary Elliot never seemed to me the sort of girl for a farmer. She certainly used to make eyes at John in Norwich. I wonder what he'll say when he hears the news?' By Jove! he was reading the *Times* when we began our game. Perhaps he knows it already.'

When dinner time arrived John was not there, so the meal was commenced without him. He returned, however, when dessert was on the table, and said he had had something to eat out, and would not have any dinner.

'I wanted a good walk,' he remarked, 'as I had a headache, and the walk has done me good. I hope you will all excuse me for not being punctual.'

'John,' said his father, 'have you heard the news about that poor girl, Mary Elliot?'

'News? What news?' he answered in a mechanical tone, and carefully avoiding the eyes of the speaker.

'She has drowned herself. There is a whole column in the *Times*.'

John's voice became still more mechanical, as he added, 'How very sad. When did it occur?'

'Last week,' said Charley, looking a little curiously at his friend.

Little further was said, all the party being depressed by the subject.

That evening Dr Dawson, meeting his son alone in the garden, told him what John's father had said respecting the family history of the Armstrongs, and mentioned John's unaccountable behaviour that afternoon.

Charley's face clouded a little as he replied:—

'Oh, John's head's screwed on the right way: there's no mistake about that.'

When his father had gone, however, he could not help turning over in his mind what he had just heard.

'It does seem odd,' he thought. 'John's strange conduct might, after all, have been due to his reading the account of the inquest—I'm sure he had the paper in his hands. Perhaps he really was in love with that girl.'

It was the evening before the wedding day. John had managed to recover some of his lost gaiety, and Edith was supremely happy.

All were in the drawing-room discussing the details of the morrow.

'Edith,' said her mother, 'you and John will be far enough off this time to-morrow.' (Edith and John were going to visit some of the continental capitals for their honeymoon). 'We shall miss you, dear.'

'Never mind,' said Dr Armstrong, smiling. 'When they come home, Mrs Dawson, you must make us a long visit, and you will be able to enjoy her company as before.'

At this moment a servant knocked at the door, and said that a man particularly wanted to see young Dr Armstrong.

'Who is he, Martha?' asked John's father.

'He's a labouring man, I think,' she replied, 'and looks as if he worked in the fields.'

'Probably it's a patient. I'll go, John.'

'No, no, father, he asked for me,' said his son, 'so I may as well see him. Ask him into the consulting-room, Martha,' he added, as the servant left the room.

When John a little later went to see his patient, on entering the room he started violently.

'Why, surely I have seen you before, my man?' he said in a tone of surprise.

'Yes, doctor, ye saved my life once, and I'm sorry for't.' There was a peculiar tone about Joe's voice, and a withering look upon Joe's face, for the visitor was Joe Smith, as our reader may have guessed.

'Na doubt, doctor, ye're surprised t' see me,' he continued, 'ye may knaw, too, it baint an easy job for a working mon loike myself to gad a' this distance t' see ye. But I were bound to coom, if I cam' afoot a' the way.'

'Well, Smith, I remember you now,' stammered John, 'but I must confess I don't quite understand what you mean.'

But he turned pale, as if he had a foreboding that something unexpected was about to happen.

'Do ye knaw this?' said the other almost fiercely, drawing forth a letter and a photograph from his pocket, and handing them to him, 'do ye knaw where I found 'em? I tell 'e I found 'em in the water close to poor Miss Mary's foot. Aye, the letter were in her hand when she jumped in, poor lamb.

'Ye saw most loike whaat the papers said o' the inquest, and how the postmistress told coroner of a letter writ to the post-office. Maybe ye wondered where that letter were? It were lucky for ye old Joe found that letter, and couldna forget ye saved his life in the hospital, tho' he's sorry for't naw.'

John's face became bloodless—he trembled all over. He could have been bold and brave enough in a good cause, but now abject fear took possession of him, and paltry he seemed to the honest servant of Farmer Elliot, who rose to leave.

He could say nothing. He saw that no excuse would avail him in the eyes of this man, and so utter was his consternation, that he actually drew out his purse with the intention of making a money gift to his old patient.

Joe with a contemptuous shake of his head signified dissent:—

'Na, na, it was naat for money Joe Smith kep' back

the letter from the coroner's jury. He'll touch none of it. Good-night, sir, it's quits 'tween us naw, I owe ye nought. Good-night.'

John as if in a dream got up and began to thank Joe for his consideration, at the same time trying to grasp his hand.

'Ye owe me na thanks,' said the latter. 'I told ye we be quits, but I canna take your hand, sir, I seem to see naw poor Miss Mary's foot floating in the water.'

John sank back in his chair, and buried his face in his hands. A minute later he heard the hall door shut, and knew that Joe had gone.

To-morrow was his wedding day. He groaned aloud—So one person knew already of his baseness; how long would it be before all the world did?

The tell-tale letter must be destroyed at all hazards. He lit a taper, and setting light to the letter watched it burn away on the hearth. Would that he could as easily obliterate the remembrance.

He must now join the others, or they would wonder what was delaying him. His hand shook like an aspen, so he was afraid to present himself in the drawing-room; they would be sure to notice his altered appearance and question him as to the 'patient.'

He put on his hat, went into the hall, and called Martha, telling her to inform his father he had to see a patient a little distance off, and if he were delayed they were not to sit up.

Martha did as she was instructed.

'Why couldn't the boy let me see to this,' said his father, 'the evening before his wedding, too.'

'No, he was quite right to think of you, Dr Armstrong,' said Edith, defiantly.

‘Ah, you’ll have plenty of his company after to-day, won’t you, Edith?’ replied the doctor, laughing.

John did not return till it was time to go to bed. He at once said ‘Good night.’

Never did expectant bridegroom pass a more wretched night.

CHAPTER X

JOHN COMMENCES PRACTICE AT DRIFFIELD

‘ Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.’

AFTER a fitful and unrefreshing sleep, John awoke on the morning of his wedding day.

He remembered well Charley’s wedding only a few months before. How different that was, and how happy Charley and his sister were !

He could not help reflecting how different the case was with himself. He could not hope for their happiness.

It was true Edith loved him, but his own life was doomed to be henceforth one of dissimulation : he must pretend a love which he little felt, and do so in the face of one whose love for him made her eyes preternaturally sharp, and likely to discover the deception.

When Edith did discover the truth, as he felt sure she would some day, what then ? How would he appear in the eyes of her he had deceived ?

If John dreaded one thing more than another, it was that Edith’s love would be changed to scorn. However, he must now go through with the wedding : he had made his own bed, and must lie on it, and it was too late to trouble about Edith’s future unhappiness.

He dressed himself slowly and deliberately, carefully

noting in the glass that his features showed no signs of recent agitation.

Edith was supremely happy on this her wedding day. She had no distrust of John, no suspicion that the love he was that day to pledge did not exist. The rude awakening was bound to come, but in the meanwhile, it was fortunate that she was able to enjoy one of the greatest pleasures of life, the feeling of faith in her beloved, and knowledge she was about to have him for her own.

What though the joy were unreal, it was none the less true to her, and if we were to gauge by their reality one-half the pleasures we each of us enjoy, it is to be feared there would be a lack of these commodities in the world.

She looked quite an ideal bride when John led her to the altar in her bridal apparel. John was pale and impassive, and there was a look on his face, which, in spite of his self-control, struck his father as strange, and brought a cloud to his heart, otherwise overflowing with delight at beholding the fruition of his hopes.

There was a brilliant attendance at the wedding and breakfast, and many of the best people of the country—old patients of John's father—had come to do honour to the family.

Sir James Feltham, the member for the North Riding, proposed the health of the couple, and in his reply, John expressed satisfaction at the well wishes of his numerous friends, and hoped that in a short time, he and his wife would be settled in their midst.

There seemed to the company a ring of insincerity in his words, and several of Dr Armstrong's old patients could not help contrasting unfavourably the somewhat unnatural and artificial bearing of the son, with the open candour of the father.

Charley, too, regarded John a little suspiciously. He had known him for many years, and felt sure he was changed. He had thought that Mary Elliot's sad death had had something to do with this, but he little dreamt what had been John's share in the tragedy.

He was fond of his sister, and anxious for her future welfare, and he had been inclined to think that John had not shown Edith all a lover's attention. But then, Charley was judging John's feelings by his own, and he had been a very impulsive lover: and his legal training had taught him that it is particularly unsafe to assume that the same passions affect equally different individuals.

On the whole he thought all would come right, and he cheerfully bade the pair good-bye, when they started for the station.

'It's your turn now, John,' he said; 'and mark me, you won't be in a hurry any more than I was, to return to work, though of course you'll have to.'

'Edith will see to that,' said his wife; 'she won't let John make such a fool of himself as you did, Charley.'

'There, John, that's the way your wife will speak when you have been married a month or two. That's the way they sneer at well-intentioned efforts to please them,' and Charley put on a look of mock severity.

'If we do as comfortably as you seem to have done,' said John smiling, 'we shan't have much to complain of, shall we, Edith?'

John's father and most of the guests stood in the porch to see them drive away, and they were soon speeding southward to catch the continental packet at Harwich.

It was their intention to visit first the old Flemish cities, then to go to Brussels, and after that to Paris. They were to take a month, and Edith expected much pleasure from John pointing out the places he had

visited in the past, and from his showing her the old pictures and relics of bygone times.

The weather proved favourable, and Edith greatly enjoyed the roaming over these medieval cities with John. She was quite happy, and her honeymoon passed pleasantly enough. John, too, was able to forget the past, and to throw off the melancholy that recent events had brought. He really tried to make his wife happy, and in so doing was able to dull his own remorse.

They visited Bruges, climbed the old Belfry, and listened to the quaint *carillon*. They were present at Services in the cathedrals, and wandered over the streets of the ancient city.

They next visited Ghent and Malines, and stayed a week at Brussels, where Edith admired the wonderful Town Hall and the grand old houses adjoining, and she was not a little pleased with the gaiety and elegant life of the Belgian capital. She thought the 'Bois' specially delightful as she drove through it with her husband.

'Ah, Edith,' he said, 'wait till you have seen Paris, you won't then think so much of this : it is Paris on a small scale.'

'Brussels is very nice, John,' she answered, 'and perhaps I like it all the better for being on a small scale. Paris may be too big for me, but I will reserve my opinion.'

The last ten days of the honeymoon were spent in Paris, and Edith found the French capital a little too large and bustling. The excitement of life with all its anxieties were as intense in this city as anywhere.

It was true there were plenty of interesting sights ; but their very number made her head ache, and she found herself looking forward with a sensation of relief to the time when they would return home.

An incident, too, occurred, which threw a gloom on the holiday, and which she did not for a long time forget.

They were walking one afternoon along the Rue de Rivoli, when suddenly they saw a crowd on the bank of the river. Impelled by curiosity they approached, and as they drew near the crowd divided, and two men were allowed to pass bearing something on stretchers. It was the body of a young woman of twenty-two just drawn out of the Seine.

Edith shivered and clung to John's arm as they passed by: but soon the procession was out of sight, and all quiet again.

Edith breathed freely, but looking up into John's face, she was surprised to see the change there. He was very pale, and took no notice of her, but had his eyes fixed on the direction the corpse had been taken. He stood still, and made no attempt to go on.

'What is the matter, John?' she exclaimed; and when he made no answer, she vehemently repeated the question.

This aroused him from his reverie, and he stammered, 'Yes—yes—Edith, I'm all right, but—that dreadful sight.'

'Yes, it was a dreadful sight,' she answered, shuddering, 'but why are you so pale?'

'Am I pale?' he replied, with a feeble attempt at a smile. 'I feel right enough;' but there was a tone of insincerity in his voice, and he looked far from right.

The sudden appearance of the poor victim of the Seine had brought back other thoughts. He could not help thinking of another victim, and of the share he himself had had in her fate.

They returned to the hotel, Edith alarmed at the alteration in her husband, and more than ever surprised at its apparent cause. All her questions he answered

absent-mindedly, and a thorough gloom seemed to have settled upon him.

'What are you thinking of, John?' she more than once asked. 'What makes you so miserable?'

Again he replied with an attempt at a smile, 'I'm not miserable, dear.'

'You don't look very happy,' she retorted.

'They had to hurry to be in time for the *table d'hôte*, and Edith noticed that during the meal her husband scarcely touched a morsel, and she became still more anxious.'

When dinner was over, an English lady, who was staying at the same hotel, asked Edith to stroll out to look at the shops in the Rue de la Madeleine.

Edith glanced towards John, who heard the request.

'Yes, do, dear, it will amuse you,' he said; 'I have one or two letters to write.'

When Edith had gone, however, instead of writing letters, John put on his hat and went out, and then, drawn by some fascination, walked towards Notre Dame.

But it was not the cathedral he was seeking, for when almost under the shadow of that edifice he crossed the road, and made for a low-roofed building bearing over the doorway the inscription, 'REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE,' and standing on the edge of the river.

It was the Morgue. He pushed open the swing doors, and entered. He had been to this building more than once before, but his other visits had been prompted by special and utilitarian objects. As a student he had been desirous of seeing how the French managed institutions of this kind, and of being able to form an opinion as to the relative advantages of the French and English mortuary.

This time he could not say why he had come, except

with some half-formed desire of seeing again the body of the woman who had been borne by that afternoon in the Rue de Rivoli.

And there she was straight before him. Two Parisians had their noses flattened against the glass behind which the bodies were arranged for recognition, but the window was spacious enough to permit him to see everything.

There was the long, dripping hair, pallid face, blue lips and staring eyes; so, he felt intuitively Mary looked, when Joe Smith helped to bear her to the farm. And he was the cause of it all! Was another similarly guilty of the death of this woman?

Nearly half-an-hour he lingered in the Morgue, and then returned to his hotel, to find Edith anxiously inquiring for him.

'I don't think I shall go out again to-night, dear,' he said; 'I feel tired.'

'Why then, John,' she replied, 'the opera tickets will be wasted.'

He remembered they held tickets for that night, and it did seem a pity they should be wasted.

So he decided to go to the Opera House, and a little later, he and Edith were watching a performance of Gounod's *Faust*, done as it only can be in Paris, in which some of the performers were world-famous artistes.

To Edith, who was a good musician, the performance was magnificent, but to John the subject was not so delightful, and seemed to still further intensify his mental trouble, and it was with a sigh of relief he saw the curtain descend at the close of the evening.

The next day he was in better spirits, but Edith noticed that during the remainder of their stay at Paris, he never quite got over the melancholy, engendered by the chance meeting with the body drawn out of the Seine.

At the end of the month they returned home, and John settled at Driffield to help in his father's practice.

His father was delighted to have Edith as mistress of the house. It seemed another place in her presence, and as a daughter she ministered to the comfort of the old man.

But John was not all the success at Driffield his father had hoped he would be. As to knowledge and skill in his profession, he was second to none, and could hold his own with his father or any practitioner. But in that address and tact with patients, the outcome of years of experience, and not infrequently as much a special gift to the individual as any other talent, he fell much behind his father.

The latter noticed with surprise, not unmixed with disappointment, that his son's entrance into the practice, far from giving the universal satisfaction he had anticipated, rather diminished than increased it.

That professional address which is often lightly regarded as beneath the dignity of a physician, and appertaining more to quackery than to the accomplishments of a scientific practitioner, was much wanted at Driffield.

The various members of county families, and aristocratic patients, that old Dr Armstrong had on his list, often required a doctor for multifarious ailments, that had no place in any scientific nomenclature of disease. Under such circumstances their successful treatment depended more on natural shrewdness, than knowledge obtained from books, or picked up in the wards of a hospital. So that John was particularly at a discount in his management of such cases : and if he did not in so many words deny the reality of his patient's complaint, he had a tendency to show by his manner he considered it of

little importance, and by so doing often destroyed all confidence of the patient in his doctor.

He performed several successful operations by which he gained great reputation in the district : but taking everything together, his entrance into practice was not an unmitigated success.

Had his father reflected, he might have perceived that what had happened was what might have been expected. For if he had been peculiarly successful, and he was aware he had been, it was at least unlikely his son would inherit exactly the talents which had given him that success.

The son much excelled the father in some attainments, and therefore, it was but natural he should fall behind in others.

John's want of success, however, had important results. In the first place it intensified his dislike to this kind of practice, and made him look with longing eyes more and more towards the metropolis. Secondly, the discontent it engendered tended to depress, and lay him more open to stings of remorse.

He well knew that while his father lived, he would have to remain at Driffeld, as nothing would induce the old man to leave his native place.

Edith, too, was satisfied, and had no ambition to change the country for London ; but as time went on she could not help noticing her husband's periodic fits of melancholy, and puzzling as to their cause.

John showed her every consideration and kindness, and her domestic life was happy. If she had doubts as to whether John loved her as Charley did Alice, she ascribed the difference to the temperament of her husband ; and she believed he gave her all the love it was possible for him to give to any woman, and so she was content.

And now a change came to their Driffeld life. The

health of John's father showed signs of failing. He was nearly seventy, and although his constitution had been excellent, and he had never indulged in those excesses which frequently play havoc with the best, yet a country doctor's life is always more or less a hard one.

The constant grinding at the wheel, day and night, winter and summer ; the frequent exposure to cold and wet, and the terrible mental strain often associated with professional responsibility ; all these are factors which tend to degeneration and disease, even in the most healthy.

He became too feeble to visit his old patients, and could only see them at home : and after a while even this was too fatiguing.

Edith was quite a daughter, and smoothed his infirmities with the most unremitting attention. Often the old man's eyes would light up with joy at her sight, and he would talk proudly to his son of her good qualities, and exhort him to make the most of such a wife.

John did not tire of hearing his wife's praises, and would answer, ' You are right, father, you are quite right, Edith is too good for me.'

A year had passed, and there was reason to expect the advent of a grandchild. It was the one wish of John's father, to make the acquaintance of this direct descendant of the Armstrongs, before he took his departure for the unseen world.

It was true he had already one grandson, for Charley was a happy father, and Alice had proudly brought the child to receive her father's blessing. But still he yearned after John's child, for that was the child to link him, and the bygone Armstrongs, with the future. Alice's child was all very well, but he wasn't an Armstrong.

It is curious how the thoughts of age recur to the past,

and how memory of the long ago seems to be rekindled, to the obliteration of more recent events.

Old Dr Armstrong often spoke to Edith of his father and mother, and the days when he was young: would tell the story of bygone members of his family, and of the respect in which his name had been held for generations.

‘You will look after the young one when I am gone, Edith,’ he said on one occasion, ‘and train him well, for we Armstrongs have always held up our heads, and there have been none to point shame at us.’

Edith blushed and looked towards her husband, who came into the room at this instant. She was surprised to see how pained he was, and ascribed it to anxiety for his father, who had lately become weaker.

Much as the old doctor longed to see his son’s child, it was fated not to be. Some months before the expected event, it was evident he was sinking. The Dawsons were hurriedly summoned, and although, owing to the state of the weather and their increasing age, Dr and Mrs Dawson could not travel to Driffeld—for it was midwinter—Charley and his wife came to see the end.

Two days after Christmas, the second Christmas from that in which he had so cheerfully entertained them before Alice’s marriage, the old man peacefully passed away with all his children round him.

John’s hand was in his at the last, and his dying eyes rested fondly and affectionately on his son. ‘There at least,’ thought the latter, ‘is no suspicion.’

Edith was alarmed by the extreme despondency in her husband after his father’s death, but naturally ascribed it to that cause, and did her best to comfort him; but she was compelled to confess he was an altered man, although some of this despondency by degrees wore off.

It was true there had been no sudden change, the alteration had been gradual, but none the less she was beginning to recognise it.

After his father's death, John found that from a money point of view he was in easy circumstances, for the former had left everything to him, with the exception of a bequest of £2000 to Alice. He was thus the possessor of over £8000, not including the value of the freehold and practice at Driffield.

After the old doctor's death, the practice fell off noticeably. Several influential patients, who would never have gone elsewhere while John's father lived, now ceased to employ the old firm. In addition, competition had become more keen, as a popular practitioner had lately joined an old-established firm about three miles from Driffield.

Not that John could not always have done a good practice, and if not equal to that of his father, yet sufficiently good according to the times. But Driffield and country life had long been distasteful, and he had resolved to cut himself adrift from these associations, and begin life anew in the metropolis. There he hoped that amid its bustle and activity a certain aching spot in his conscience might be lulled, or at least that he might forget it, amid the stirring ambition of London professional life.

But, alas! John forgot his 'Horace,' *Cælum non animam mutant, qui trans mare currunt*, and though physical or mental stimulants will for a time obscure the sound of the 'still, small voice,' the reaction will surely come, and in proportion as it has been stifled will make itself heard, so long as our moral organisation is not more or less destroyed: too often, also, at times when its tones are almost intolerable!

Three months after Dr Armstrong's death the expected

child arrived, and Edith felt all the joys and anxieties of a mother.

She had got to love the old house and country surrounding it, and wished for nothing better than for her son to grow up amid these scenes : so that it was with no little pain she learned, when the child was barely twelve months old, that her husband had determined to sell the Driffeld property, and to migrate to London.

‘You see, dear,’ he said, ‘there is shortly to be a vacancy on the staff of St Barnabas’ Hospital, and Sir George Hamilton, the senior surgeon, has promised me his support. If I get the appointment, I have no doubt I shall be able to hold my own, and with the capital we have, we may safely take a house in Cavendish Square. Even your father thinks the speculation safe ; and when we are established in the West End of London, I can find you, dear, a very different position in society to that you hold here.’

‘I should be content to stay here all my life, John,’ she replied. ‘I’m sure I don’t want better society. But of course you must do what you think necessary’—and she sighed.

‘Then, again, dear, how near we shall be to Charley and Alice,’ he pleaded.

So a house in Cavendish Square was decided on, if John could get the appointment at St Barnabas.

In the meanwhile, he had been negotiating the sale of his practice at Driffeld, and had requested several agents to send him suitable purchasers.

It happened one day, while these negotiations were going on, that Martha informed him a gentleman wished to see him. She handed him a card, which bore the name, ‘James Benson, M.D.’ When he went into his consulting-room the visitor rose, and held out his hand—

'I think, Dr Armstrong,' he said, 'I have had the pleasure of meeting you before.'

'Indeed, Dr Benson, I can't say I remember you.'

'Oh, yes,' continued Dr Benson, 'two years ago I released you, when *locum* for Dr Ling at Fritton.'

John's heart stood still. He hurriedly sat down, and endeavoured to hide his confusion. With a forced smile he gasped out, 'To be sure—to be sure.'

They then began to discuss details as to the transfer of the practice, but all the while John kept saying to himself, 'This man must not come here. Whoever buys the practice, he shall not.'

After examining the books, and asking various questions, Dr Benson said, 'I think I understood from Mr Crocker'—he was one of the agents—'you required £2000 for the practice? It seems to me that the price is fair, and if I find'—

'But,' interrupted John, 'there are the house and grounds, the freehold of which could not be reckoned at less than £2000.'

'Your agent, Dr Armstrong, said nothing about that!' 'Would you not be willing to grant a lease at a rent? It will not be easy for you to find a purchaser in our profession with £4000 to invest.'

The common sense of this was obvious, and John had never dreamed of insisting that his successor should purchase the freehold of the property; he had even mentioned to the agent what he would consider a reasonable rent. But he suddenly thought of this device as a means of putting off Dr Benson. So he replied he would think the matter over, and write to him, but that he desired, if possible, to sell the property out and out.

'What a curious man Dr Armstrong is,' thought the other, as he left the house. 'Why was he so upset when

I reminded him of our previous meeting? For some reason or other he is not desirous of selling *me* his practice.'

A week before the election, John went to London to canvass actively, leaving a *locum tenens* at Driffild.

As the train rushed southward he carelessly glanced down the columns of a newspaper. His eye caught the heading, 'FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE—DELHI—ILLNESS OF BISHOP JACKSON.' 'Why! Bishop Jackson,' he said to himself, 'was the bishop Paget was to go abroad with.' His interest was aroused, and he read, 'We regret to have to announce that Dr Jackson is lying seriously ill with malarial fever. The new bishop has been indefatigable, and it is thought that his present illness is not a little due to over-work. Fortunately the duties of the mission are being ably undertaken by his chaplain, the Rev. James Paget, who is reaping golden opinions.'

'Ah,' mused John, 'Paget is doing good work as usual. He has a genius for preaching, and is doubtless able to shine as a missionary; but why didn't he stay at home? Whatever could have induced him to go abroad? If he does gain fame there, he might have done better at home.'

To John it seemed almost incredible that any one on account of moral duty should be willing to expatriate himself, without the inducement of great personal advantages, and he had quite dismissed from his mind the idea of Paget being in love with Edith, although at one time he had certainly suspected it.

Such a mind as James Paget's was beyond his comprehension, and although he could admire the other's genius as a preacher, he failed utterly to grasp those traits in his character on which his chief merit depended, his inflexible principles and inestimable moral worth.

On arrival in London John was soon involved in all the excitement of a contested election.

There were several strong candidates in the field, and from a professional point of view he might indeed consider himself fortunate, if he could gain the post at St Barnabas.

Dr Dawson brought before several of the influential governors the reputation John had gained at the Norwich Hospital. Luckily, also, a noble lord, one of his father's old patients in the north, had great interest, and used it on his behalf. So after a week of activity, in which no stone was left unturned which might assist his efforts, he found himself elected one of the assistant surgeons to St Barnabas.

He at once wired the result to his wife, and at the same time informed her by letter he had found a purchaser for his practice, and should return to Driffeld to give the latter a short introduction, after which they would finally bid adieu to the north.

He wrote in an exulting tone, and Edith, while she felt glad to notice his unusual exuberance of spirits, could not help sighing as she reflected that their home life there was at an end.

She glanced sadly round at the old rooms, and the garden with all the peace and restfulness, which was so soon to be exchanged for the turmoil of town life.

Even Norwich had been in some respects too much for her: what would London be? But John's future was too much involved to allow of protest, so, taking the baby from the arms of the nurse who was sitting by her side, she fondled it, and felt some relief in thinking that his young intelligence could not comprehend the loss, which to her mind seemed as much his as hers.

CHAPTER XI

A LETTER IN THE 'MERCURY'

'Ye Gods, ye Gods, must I endure all this?'

THE house that the Armstrongs had taken in Cavendish Square was of considerable size, and it was found necessary to begin housekeeping with four servants; so John saw it would be well to look round for the means of getting an income, or his capital would soon melt away.

It was fortunate that his father's old patient, who had helped him so effectually on to the staff of St Barnabas, was also influential in certain aristocratic circles, and used his efforts very generously in promoting John's success in private practice.

Lord Neville, in fact, had taken a fancy to John, and his feelings towards him were heightened by the respect and gratitude he had always felt towards his father, who had attended him successfully through more than one dangerous illness.

John likewise applied all his energies to his hospital appointment, and soon began to make a name for himself.

St Barnabas was the chief surgical school in the metropolis, and as surgery was John's strong point, his skill and ability soon began to be bruited about far and

wide, and it became the fashion for men to come from all parts to see Mr Armstrong operate at St Barnabas.

As a lecturer he also made his mark. His classes were invariably crowded, and medical publishers began to approach him with tempting offers to edit manuals on professional subjects.

So in a short time John found himself a fashionable consultant. The guineas began to pour in, and his consulting-room was rarely empty in the morning. A dashing carriage and pair bore him to all parts of the town during the day, and in the evening his voice was heard at meetings of learned societies, where the views of the rising surgeon were listened to, with respect, by his professional brethren.

John was now thoroughly immersed in the life he had so often longed for. There was an absorbing excitement which at first did come as a relief to his overstrung nervous condition. The past seemed more effectually banished than it ever had been, and he hoped that conscience would by degrees grow quieter, and allow him to devote all his powers, to promote the professional success which seemed almost assured.

The change in their worldly circumstances had a different effect on Edith. The increased style and luxury in which they were forced to live, the social intercourse required by the aristocratic *clientèle* of a fashionable London surgeon, and, in fact, all the demands of society, were extremely wearying, and seemed more than ever to separate her from her husband. She sighed as she saw that the little rift between them, which had worried her in the past, was still less likely to be effaced in the future. Her fashionable duties prevented her from giving the attention she would have liked to her growing son, whom it had been her wish to train and nurture from the first.

As Dr Armstrong's wife, however, Edith amply played her part in promoting his professional success: and at his dinner-table, and in the drawing-rooms of his more important patients, her stately form and refined features were not without their influence, and helped to consolidate her husband's social success, on which the greatness of a professional career may in no little measure depend.

John had from the first devoted himself to the surgical branch of his profession. It was in this he distinguished himself at Norwich, and as assistant surgeon to St Barnabas, he had every opportunity of applying himself entirely to this practice.

Three years later he became surgeon, and he was then able to give full scope to his ambitious schemes of extending his art.

The world soon began to ring with reports of novel operations at St Barnabas, the wonderful success of which more and more extended the fame of the operator.

John was a surgeon with great talents; but Surgery is an art, which often dazzles the eyes of its votaries, and blinds them to the consequences of endeavouring to improve too far on nature's resources.

It should never be forgotten that Surgery, unless a practical science—that is, unless it serves to lighten pain and prolong life—is of little worth. Some surgeons apply the term 'brilliant' to operations, which, judged in the light of common sense, are scarcely likely to benefit the patient, however much they may enhance the fame of the operator.

Surgery tends to lose more than to gain by work of this kind, and it is the duty of the surgeon not to be led away by one or two successful results, but to question every detail of the operation. Although a single life really saved might justify much, it would require the cure

of many deformities to justify the sacrifice of one life, when the cure could only be effected by an operation dangerous in itself.

John was at this time in serious danger of being led away by the desire of distinguishing himself as an operator, through underestimating his responsibility to the patient. Unfortunately, too, it was the fashion then for surgeons all over the world to emulate one another by striving who should do the most daring operation, and make the most startling innovation in Surgery. And while every success was given the utmost publicity, being chronicled everywhere in the lay and professional press, little attention was paid to the victims, who in all probability paved the way to these apparent triumphs.

As assistant surgeon it had always been customary, before doing an unusual operation, to consult with the seniors, and John's natural impetuosity was thus held in check by their maturer judgment.

But when at an early age he himself became a senior, this wholesome bar was removed, and a free hand given to an operator already chafing under a restraint, that had more than once been imposed on the carrying out of a cherished scheme.

So that much as John exulted in his appointment, it was by no means without pitfalls to his future success. He must now stand alone, and if he made up his mind to act according to the dictates of his own genius, he must not forget that he was throwing away that shield so valuable to a growing reputation, as a protection against the criticism of enemies in event of disaster—the sharing of responsibility with men of older years, and more assured celebrity.

When all the doubt and difficulty which envelops the simplest operation is considered, when we see unfortunate results not infrequently follow the best planned,

and most skilfully executed—for the constitution of the patient must be always, more or less, an unknown factor—bold, indeed, must be the surgeon, who will take unshared the responsibility on his shoulders, and more than doubtful will be his success, unless he either have no failures or no enemies.

This was not John's case. Few men can rise in the world without exciting a certain amount of ill-will in others less fortunate than themselves, and he was to find that :—

‘He who surpasses or subdues mankind,
Must look down on the hate of those below.’

There were plenty of aspirants after professional fame, who bitterly envied the success of the rising surgeon, and were only too ready to find fault, and drag into publicity any failure on his part they might discover.

Such was the state of things, when one evening John was accosted at his club by a certain Lord Knowsley, who was both a personal friend and a patient.

‘My dear Armstrong, what have you been up to? Whom have you been carving at the hospital? You know, it's all very well for you surgeons, but the public don't take quite so kindly to the knife.’

‘My Lord,’ said John, ‘I don't understand you—’

‘What? Haven't you seen the *Mercury*? You'll want to see the Editor when you have!

After a few minutes' conversation with Lord Knowsley, John hurried to the reading-room, his mind full of indignation that any newspaper should have dared to comment on his conduct.

He soon possessed himself of a copy of the *Mercury*, and eagerly running his eyes down the columns of that paper, found among the editorials the following :—

‘As will be seen from a letter we publish this morning,

a sad casualty has just occurred at St Barnabas. A patient was recently admitted into that institution suffering from a minor disease which did not threaten life, and only occasionally gave rise to a little inconvenience.

'Without any consultation between the members of the staff a serious operation was performed, and it was then found that no surgical interference was called for. The patient, however, died less than twenty-four hours afterwards.

'It is much to be regretted that such an episode should have occurred at so important an institution, as it will be difficult to convince the public that such operations are justifiable, however eminent the surgeon who performs them.

'As not long ago we published an appeal on behalf of the governors for further funds, it is only right to warn them that misadventures of this kind are not calculated to open the purses of the public.'

John then sought for the letter referred to. It ran as follows :—

'Sir,

'A poor girl was admitted into St Barnabas a few days ago suffering from an ailment, which, if at times painful, has never been known to be fatal.

'She was operated on last Wednesday, and was dead by Thursday afternoon. Mr John Armstrong was the operator, and it is worthy of note that although the youngest surgeon, he did not see fit to consult his colleagues before doing an operation as dangerous as novel.

'This gentleman has, on several other occasions, distinguished himself by attempting surgical feats which no other surgeon would venture upon, and if it were only his own reputation that were at stake, the matter might not be so grave ; but when it is no less than the reputation of one of the largest medical charities in the metropolis

which is involved, it seems to me that some public notice ought to be taken of this incident.

I am, yours truly,

F.R.C.S.'

John's first feeling on reading the letter was one of unbounded indignation.

Who had dared write in this way about him? What injury might it not do his reputation?

If there were law in England the writer should smart for it—for of the libellous character of the letter, he thought, there could be no doubt.

'I wonder who "F.R.C.S." is,' he said to himself. 'He seems to be well informed about St Barnabas, and that I had no consultation in the case of that poor girl Johnson. It might be Butcher himself! I know he's bitterly jealous, and spites me wherever he can.'

Mr Butcher was one of John's colleagues on the staff of St Barnabas, and had been not a little envious of the rise into fame of the younger surgeon.

'If it should be Butcher, I'll go for him, whatever it costs! Yes, I will! In the meanwhile, I had better see Charley.'

John threw down the paper, seized his hat, and hurried from the club. His first care was to purchase a copy of the *Mercury*, then to call a cab, and order the driver to take him to the nearest metropolitan railway station, and he was soon on the way to Finchley.

When he arrived at Charley's house it was getting late. He was shown into the drawing-room, where he found his sister, who was surprised to see him at this time of the day.

'How's Edith, John?' she asked anxiously, 'there's nothing wrong I hope? And the boy, too? You don't often honour us with a visit.'

'All are quite well, Alice, but Edith doesn't even

know I'm here. To tell the truth I come on rather important business, and want especially to see Charley to-night.'

'You can see him,' replied his sister, 'but he's dreadfully tired, and has only just had his dinner, as he was detained at the office. In fact, he only got home half-an-hour ago. Don't worry him, John, more than you can help.'

John looked tired himself, and his sister noticed it.

'You don't seem well either,' she added, 'but I will go and see where Charley is.'

She left the room, but in a few minutes returned, and told John that he would find her husband in the study. 'But do come up into the drawing-room and have a cup of tea when your business is done,' she said, as he left her presence.

When John entered the room in which his brother-in-law was sitting, Charley rose and greeted him warmly. He had evidently been deep in business, and numerous papers were scattered over his desk.

'What? Is it you?' he said. 'What on earth brings you over here at this unearthly hour? You look anxious, too! Is any one bringing an action against you?'

'No, but I think of bringing an action myself, and have come to consult you,' and seeing his friend looked incredulous, he threw down before him the copy of the *Mercury*, exclaiming, 'There, read that! Isn't that libellous? Can I be expected to stand that?'

Charley carefully perused the paragraph and letter. He then deliberately took off his eye-glasses, re-adjusted them, and read the letter through a second time.

'It is rather a nasty letter,' he remarked, 'but the editor won't give you the name of "F.R.C.S.," so whom are you going to bring your action against? You can

go for damages against the paper if you *choose*.' There was a marked emphasis on the last word.

'If I choose,' repeated John sharply. 'Do you advise me to put up with such an attack on my professional reputation? Can I do otherwise than bring an action? Besides, I feel sure "F.R.C.S." is none other than Butcher, one of my colleagues.

'What? Fred Butcher of St Barnabas?' said his friend. 'By jove, that complicates matters! An action for libel between two well-known surgeons of St Barnabas will be exciting, but won't tend to do that institution any good. You won't please the governors by such a course. Now, my dear fellow, you must think seriously over this. I have heard that Fred Butcher is a cunning devil, and this letter, if really written by him, looks odd. It looks,' Charley hesitated for a moment, 'yes, it does look as if he might be tempting you to bring an action—in other words, might be laying a trap.'

'Then I shall walk into it,' answered John angrily, 'and perhaps, by-and-bye he will find he has got into a trap himself.'

'No, no, John,' said the other, 'don't lose your temper! Be reasonable, look at the matter from every point of view, and above all consider your weak points. You must excuse me, old man, but isn't it true that you have been operating a little extensively lately? There's the case "F.R.C.S." refers to; then a week ago, when I was in Norwich I saw the governor, and he particularly asked after you, and spoke of your great success; but I clearly perceived, from the tenor of his remarks, he was a little alarmed by the boldness of some of your operations. Now, if a man so well-disposed towards you as my father has his doubts, and one who is a member of your own profession, what may not be the opinion of your brethren here in London? If an action is brought, all this will

have to be gone into, and it is not pleasant ; what the jury will have to decide will be in a great measure as to the value of some of these recent operations ; and as they can form no opinion themselves, their verdict will depend on the medical evidence put before them.'

'Your father,' replied John, 'is one of the old school, and naturally hesitates at modern innovations ; but the new school regards these matters quite differently, and you will find that all over the civilised world my operations are regarded as legitimate extensions of Surgery.'

'That's all very well,' said his friend, 'but may not the influence of the old school be brought to bear on a London jury ? Your opponent will hardly be likely to seek for evidence to support his case from the new school. Then, as to your colleagues, how about them ? You didn't consult them about this case, and they'll hardly take that as a compliment.'

'I could not have consulted them without consulting Butcher,' replied John, 'and I would rather have done anything than that. But I think the others are all right.' This was rather doubtfully said.

'If—' said Charley after a long pause, 'if you insist on bringing an action, I don't refuse to undertake your case, but you must understand I don't recommend it. I earnestly hope you will re-consider the whole matter. You can't imagine what a worry it will be. I have seen professional men almost brought to the grave by the anxiety necessarily involved in fighting such an action. In the case of us lawyers, it is our every-day work ; we are used to it, and take it all in the way of business ; but, you will observe, we don't often litigate among ourselves ; we know better !

'From a business point of view, the action you propose is such a one as would dazzle a young solicitor, for the vista of costs that it opens out is most encouraging. As

we are something more than solicitor and client, I should not be likely in dealing with you to be less open in my advice than I should be with an ordinary client ; and I can assure you honestly, old fellow, that under exactly the same circumstances, I should shrink from advising any client to enter into such an action as you contemplate. It is an action, that, if successful, must involve great cost, terrible anxiety, and be at the end but a barren triumph; for even if by way of argument we suppose you win your action, and make your opponent pay heavy damages, your own reputation might be seriously jeopardised by the trial, and the allegations that are sure to be made against you by your opponent and his friends ; so that the net result may be but a small recompense when the indirect loss is considered. While, if you fail, you must see you are in a worse position than before.'

'Charley,' said the other, 'your arguments are strong, I don't deny, but I feel I must do something, especially if Butcher is at the bottom of this. Surely something will be expected of me? Lord Knowsley was speaking about it only this evening, and I have no doubt I shall be hearing it on all sides for some time to come. If I do nothing, what will be thought?'

Charley shrugged his shoulders as he answered, 'I should risk that. Such remarks will be unpleasant, no doubt, but that course will be far less dangerous than the other.'

'Well, I'll think it over. But it's getting late—I'll be off. You'll write a letter, however, to the editor of the *Mercury* ?'

'Yes,' replied Charley, 'there will be no harm in that. It does not compel us to bring an action, and perhaps, we might get an apology.'

'If Butcher wrote that letter, he won't apologise,' said John, 'but, good-night.'

'Do stop and have some tea, and a chat with Alice,' said his brother-in-law, as the other got up to go, 'you so seldom pay us a visit.'

'No, much obliged, but I must really be off, Edith will be wondering what has become of me.'

He then rose, and Charley accompanied him to the door, where they parted; John hurrying away to catch the last train, Charley returning slowly and thoughtfully to his study.

He sat down to finish the work that his friend's coming had interrupted, but it was to no purpose; the latest episode occupied his thoughts, and would not allow him to think of anything else: so he put aside his papers, and lighted a cigar.

At this moment his wife noiselessly entered.

'Has John gone?' she said. 'I hoped he was coming up for a cup of tea.'

'No, I couldn't get him to stay,' answered her husband, 'he said it was too late.'

'Whatever have you two been consulting about all this time?' asked Alice, 'and what's the matter with John, he looked quite careworn this evening?'

'He will be more so before long,' was the reply, 'if he insists on having his own way. This is what is the matter with your brother,' and he handed her the newspaper, pointing out the obnoxious paragraphs.

'What a shame!' burst out Alice after reading the paper, 'surely the writer ought to be punished?'

'Why, Alice,' laughed her husband, 'you are as vindictive as John, who is only too eager to punish him, and to do so is bent on bringing an action. But the worst of it is that an action is a doubtful remedy, and might hurt John more than the offender. It's an

unfortunate business, I fear, but I think I shall go to bed now. To-morrow will be a busy day, and I must be up early to finish some of this work,' and he pointed to the papers on the table.

'Yes, you poor old thing, you do look tired,' said his wife. 'But I'm sorry for John. I wonder whether Edith knows about it, and what she thinks? I'll call to-morrow.'

CHAPTER XII

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT THE 'ÆSCULAPIAN'

'I tell thee I'll have the law of him'

ON the day following the events recorded in our last chapter, Alice called at Cavendish Square to see Edith.

It was one of the latter's 'At Home' days, and Alice found the drawing-room full of visitors. She was correspondingly disappointed, and determined to make but a short stay.

Edith, however, whispered to her to remain, so that after the callers had gone, they might have time for a little gossip.

'They won't be long,' she said, 'and it seems quite an age since you were here. You must stay to dinner.'

Alice, therefore, sat down patiently while all Edith's attention was given to her other visitors, who, by their distinguished appearance and aristocratic address, gave evidence of John's social success.

'Dear Mrs Armstrong,' lisped Lady Bellairs, 'so pleased to see you looking so well! How is the dear boy? Lady Fitzmaurice told me he was quite sadly a short time ago.'

'Better, thank you. May I give you some more tea, Lady Bellairs?'

'My dear Mrs Armstrong,' said the Honourable Mrs Fortescue, 'I was so sorry to hear of that disgraceful

attack on your husband in the *Mercury*. Mr Fortescue said the editor ought to be horsewhipped. Do you know who wrote the letter ?'

Edith blushed, and Alice looked at her inquiringly.

'Really, Mrs Fortescue, I don't know anything about it. Mr Armstrong told me something unpleasant had happened, and that he had been libelled by a newspaper, but I saw he was worried, and didn't question him on the subject.'

'Ah,' said Lady Bellairs, 'if anything of the kind had happened to my husband, I would have made him tell me all about it. My dear Mrs Armstrong, I think you are too easy with your husband. He ought to tell you about such things. He has no business to keep you in the dark.'

'I suppose,' said Mrs Holdfast, the wife of a fashionable solicitor, 'Mr Armstrong will make the editor of the *Mercury* pay damages. These newspaper people are really getting quite intolerable.'

'Yes, it is a shame !' chimed in several voices.

Edith showed by a little increased reserve the topic was disagreeable, and the conversation drifted into another channel.

After the usual small talk, and the customary cups of tea, the callers gradually dispersed, and the carriages bore homewards their occupants, nearly all pleased with and remarking on Edith's attractive manners.

'What a pleasure it was to call on that dear Mrs Armstrong. But had her husband actually killed some one at the hospital ? That really was too dreadful !'

When all the visitors had gone, and Alice and Edith were left alone in the drawing-room, they settled down to talk of themselves and their belongings.

'You know, Edith,' said Alice, 'John was at our house last night, and consulted Charley about bringing an

action against the *Mercury*, and the writer of that letter ?'

'Yes, he mentioned when he returned last night he had seen Charley, and he told me of the letter ; but he seemed so depressed that I tried to get his mind off the subject, and made light of it.'

'Edith,' eagerly exclaimed her sister-in-law, 'I know Charley recommended him not to take any legal proceedings, but John is bent on doing so, and if he persists, Charley can't very well refuse to act. You might use your influence with John to get him to abandon the notion.'

'My influence,' sighed Edith, 'I'm afraid, isn't worth much, Alice. What with company and visiting, I see next to nothing of John. It was much nicer at Driffeld. How I wish we had never come to London !'

'How can you speak so, Edith ? John could never have done at Driffeld what he has in London. London has been the making of him. Why,' she added proudly, 'he'll be a baronet one of these days, and you will be Lady Armstrong !'

The prospect did not please Edith greatly. She only sighed again.

'But you see, Edith,' said Alice, continuing the original topic, 'Charley is greatly afraid that John's professional reputation may suffer if he goes into court. You know what nasty things counsel can say. Then what a worry John makes of everything, and what a burden an action hanging over him will be, and just when he is beginning to make his way so nicely.'

'Yes,' said Edith, 'he does worry. He scarcely slept last night : and then he is so strange at times ; he quite frightens me. Once or twice in his sleep he has called me "Mary." Why should he do that, Alice ?'

The latter looked up in surprise as she answered—

'Called you "Mary." How should I know, dear?'

'Yes, it is always "Mary," Edith continued, 'never anything else. I once asked him why he did it, but he was so distressed that I was sorry I alluded to it.'

'What did he say?'

'Oh, he only said he must have been dreaming.'

Dinner was announced, and the two ladies proceeded to the dining-room, but were disappointed not to find John; and a footman shortly after brought a telegram to say he had been detained over an operation.

The two, therefore, were compelled to begin dinner by themselves. During dessert Edith had her child brought down to keep them company, and they amused themselves with his childish prattle, and the fond mother anxiously inquired of Alice what she thought of his looks. Was he not very delicate? He always seemed to be catching cold.

Alice thought the boy did not look strong. He was tall for his age and very precocious. His complexion was pale, and the veins, which appeared through the skin, were prominent, while his cheeks were apt to be unduly flushed of an evening.

Alice took care, however, not to mention her thoughts, and only remarked that all children ailed at times, and that her own Charley had a nasty cough. John would grow out of his weakness. He was thin because he was growing fast, perhaps a little too fast.

Shortly after dinner Alice went home.

Later in the evening John returned, and Edith made up her mind to speak to him about the libel.

'John, I have seen Alice,' she remarked. 'I understand that Charley does not approve of your going to law about that letter in the *Mercury*.'

'You don't mean to say,' said her husband irritably,

'that Charley has been discussing this matter with Alice?'

'It does not seem unnatural to me,' said Edith, 'that Charley should have confidence in his wife. I wish, dear, you would treat me more in the same fashion.'

John could not help noticing his wife's rebuke, and his manner softened.

'Well, Edith, I told Charley I would re-consider the matter. I don't think he quite grasps my situation. As far as the *Mercury* is concerned, I don't want to take steps against the paper, but if Butcher is, as I suspect, the author of the letter, I cannot and won't stand it. I must take some steps to protect myself, and if Butcher won't retract and apologise, what can I do but seek redress in the law courts?'

'Don't you think, John,' said his wife, 'you might ignore the letter altogether? If you did so, do you think you will really lose caste with any of your friends, or be prejudiced in your practice?'

'Yes, Edith, I do. It will get about that I perform improper operations, and people will be afraid to come to me.'

'Well,' said Edith sorrowfully, 'you ought to know your own business best. I do hope you are right, but I have such misgivings—'

There was a short pause, then John added a little brusquely: 'You needn't look so gloomily at me; I'll see that your interests, Edith, don't suffer.'

'My interests must suffer, John, if yours do,' replied his wife with tears in her eyes. 'Why will you always separate me from yourself, as if your welfare were nothing to me?'

John started at this question. He turned pale, and stammered: 'Separate myself from you! Why, you are my wife—'

‘Yes, John, I am your wife,’ she said, ‘but how little confidence you put in me! How seldom you trust me as a wife should be trusted! You often seem as if you were living a life apart—one in which I had no share. Even at Driffeld you used to do so, but it has been worse since we have lived in London. Why are you so strange? Is it because you are not well? I know you work hard—perhaps too hard—I’m sure, John, there’s something wrong.’

Her husband had quite recovered his self-possession now, and tenderly soothed her, assuring her he was quite well, and that what she noticed was due to his nervous disposition which a little extra pressure seemed to upset.

To quiet her, he gave his assurance he had by no means made up his mind to take proceedings at law.

Edith was compelled to be content, and finally left her husband, having extorted a promise that he would retire to bed early that night, and not sit up till the small hours, as he had been doing lately.

On the morning after his interview with John, Charley wrote to the editor of the *Mercury* on John’s behalf, demanding an apology, and the name of the writer of the letter: threatening the usual legal penalty in event of refusal.

By the last post he received a reply:—

‘Sir,

‘In answer to yours of to-day, I beg to say we are quite willing to apologise for any reflections on your client, inadvertently appearing in the paragraphs to which you refer.

‘With regard to disclosing the name of the writer of the letter, I regret to say our custom will not permit us.

‘I am, yours truly,

A. WAYMAN, *Editor.*’

'As I expected,' mused Charley, 'they decline to give the name of the writer. That doesn't make litigation easier. We can only sue the paper, but what solicitor could advise such a course under the circumstances?'

Just then Alice entered the room.

'Charley,' she said, 'I have seen Edith; she entirely disapproves of going to law, and tells me John is ill already. He is so strange in his behaviour—calls her "Mary" in his sleep. It is very odd, Charley! Why should John call Edith "Mary"?''

'Really, dear,' said her husband laughing, 'that is a poser!'

'We had better take counsel's opinion at once,' he continued in a bantering tone. 'But, seriously, how on earth am I to explain the vagaries of John's nightmares, brought on no doubt by overwork, and taking ill-advised and wilful steps?'

When Alice had gone, however, his mind reverted to the past.

'Calls his wife "Mary" in his sleep, does he,' he muttered. 'It's strange. Had he really a hand in that tragedy of Mary Elliot? There was something incomprehensible in his manner that afternoon at Driffield, when we first saw the account of the inquest. I don't think he's quite the lover Edith expected. She ought to have fallen in love with Paget. He worshipped the ground she trod upon.' Then he thought of the curate far away in India, whose devotion to his sister he well remembered.

The next day Charley pointed out to John, who had called at his office, the difficulty of compelling the editor of the *Mercury* to divulge the name of his correspondent.

'My dear fellow,' he said, 'you must wait. You may chance to find him out in some other way,' (he devoutly

hoped he wouldn't) 'and then you can take the steps you desire.'

John was forced to be content, but he was far from being satisfied, and an event shortly occurred which gave him the opportunity he desired.

It happened a few days later, that one or two medical men, among whom was Mr Butcher of St Barnabas, were talking together in the smoking-room of the 'Æsculapian,' a professional club of which both John and he were members.

The latter was reading an American professional journal, and he suddenly laid down the paper, and exclaimed abruptly:—

'Well, all I can say is that it's infamous the law doesn't interfere—'

'What's the matter, Butcher?' said one of those present. 'Has any one been running off with your patients?'

'Professor Coulson of Harvard has just removed the right kidney! The patient died while he was being carried from the operating-room.'

'What was the operation for?' chimed the others.

'Obscure pain in the back, as far as I can gather,' said Mr Butcher, 'but I think the operator ought to have been indicted for manslaughter.'

'Nonsense, Butcher,' said Dr Jones, one of the practitioners standing by. 'I've read that report, and it gives no details as to the clinical symptoms that called for the operation. The man's life may have been a misery to him owing to the pain he suffered, and he may have been glad to avail himself of any chance.'

'Oh, they might as well have cut his throat at once,' was the reply. 'I don't call that surgery.'

'But, Mr Butcher,' said another, who had been listening to the conversation, 'though I confess I'm not a

specialist in surgery, I certainly thought the kidney had been successfully removed many times. Why, your own colleague, Mr John Armstrong, had such a case not very long ago, and the medical papers considered his operation a great success.'

'Patient lived nine months afterwards,' scornfully rejoined the other. 'Do you call that a great success? You do well to mention Armstrong as an example,' he continued sneeringly. 'He's another like Professor Coulson! He would cut off your head if you would let him. He and Newton, and one or two others, are ruining surgery. I think, however, I've put a spoke in Armstrong's wheel, so that he won't be quite so free with his operations at St Barnabas in the future.'

'How so?' exclaimed several voices at once.

'What! haven't you heard of that case of the girl Johnson at St Barnabas? Didn't you read my letter in the *Mercury*?'

'You don't mean to say, Butcher,' said Dr Jones, in tones expressive of great disgust, 'that you are "F.R.C.S."?'

'Why not?' replied the other defiantly.

The matter then dropped. The others smoked in silence, and said nothing.

A little later, John looked in at the club, and was informed by a friend of Butcher's public confession.

The news raised his indignation to boiling point, and he hurried off to find and openly tax him with his unprofessional conduct.

He was still in the smoking-room with about a dozen others.

'So, sir,' he said, publicly accosting Mr Butcher, 'I am indebted to you for that infamous letter in the *Mercury*. No gentleman could possibly have written it; but I consider your conduct in publishing

it quite on a par with your other behaviour at St Barnabas.'

Mr Butcher was staggered at John's indignation, and turned pale, but quickly recovering himself, angrily retorted :—

'What is the meaning of this public insult, Mr Armstrong?'

'Do you deny, sir,' said John trembling with passion, 'that you wrote that letter in the *Mercury* signed "F.R.C.S."?'

'I deny nothing, sir, but your right to question my actions.'

'I'll find a means to question them!' fiercely exclaimed John, as the other turned his back on him, and left the room.

A chorus of voices at once broke out round John from those present. 'You're right, Armstrong! It's scandalous conduct! Most unprofessional! I should bring it before the Hospital Board! We'll have him out of this club!'

These and such like exclamations were made on every side. Butcher had evidently no sympathisers there.

John thanked them for their sympathy, but after a few minutes' conversation hurried away from the club, home. He immediately sat down and wrote to Charley :—

'Dear Charley, Butcher has this evening confessed publicly, at the "*Æsculapian*," that he was the writer of that letter. We had a little scene, and I have finally made up my mind that—happen what may—I will drag him before a public court, and make him substantiate the calumny contained in his letter. I trust, my dear fellow, you will not seek to alter my determination. It is fixed as the law of the Medes and Persians. I know all

you can urge against it, and I thoroughly absolve you from any harm that may be brought on my reputation thereby. With love to Alice,—Yours truly,
 'JOHN ARMSTRONG.'

On the next morning Charley received this letter. He read it carefully; saw that John's mind was made up, and that the question only remained as to whether he should, or should not, act for him.

He felt he could hardly decline. It was clearly within his brother-in-law's right to bring this action: and if he declined to act, it would be throwing an unfair imputation on John.

So later in the day, he wrote to Mr Butcher, asking for the name of a solicitor to accept service for him.

He showed John's letter to Alice, and they both considered the determination ill-advised. Charley then wrote to John, and informed him he had taken the first step in the action.

'But, my dear fellow,' he said, 'you must understand that the responsibility of the decision you have come to, must rest with yourself. I am still of the same opinion as when we last discussed the matter; that it would have been better for you to leave the perpetrator of the libel to his conscience, and the condemnation of his profession.'

Mr Butcher's public acknowledgment of the authorship of the letter to the *Mercury* created no little surprise, and John's stormy interview with him got distorted in many ways by rumour.

It was said by some that John had assaulted Mr Butcher, and that the latter was about to have him up at the police court, and there was considerable excitement in professional circles.

The indignation aroused against Mr Butcher at the

'Æsculapian'—for all the members there were professional men—made it necessary for him to resign his membership.

He was himself but a mediocre operator, and on one or two occasions had come under severe criticism for the clumsy way in which his work had been done ; but his greatest enemy could not accuse him of attempting novel operations. It was as much as he could do to carry out those well recognised, and it was really the manual dexterity and skill, combined with accurate knowledge, which he envied in the new school, and that made him so hostile to innovators in Surgery.

There was, however, one other serious result of the letter to the *Mercury*, and that newspaper's comments ; the flow of subscriptions to St Barnabas was for a time considerably curtailed, and the Board were much exercised about it.

When, therefore, it was understood that one of their own surgeons was responsible for what had happened, and that in order to injure Mr Armstrong, against whom it was notorious Mr Butcher bore ill-will, the latter had not scrupled to jeopardise the well-being of the hospital, they were correspondingly indignant.

At the Board meeting that followed shortly after, there was a strong party who would be satisfied with nothing less than Mr Butcher's resignation. After much discussion, the matter was adjourned to a special meeting a week later, and a formal notice was given to Mr Butcher to be present to defend himself.

This adjourned meeting took place on the very day a writ in the action *Armstrong v. Butcher* was issued by Charley.

The meeting was largely attended, and Sir George Hamilton was present, representing the medical staff of the hospital. Sir George Hamilton was consulting

surgeon to St Barnabas, and universally respected by all parties.

On Mr Butcher being called into the Board room, the chairman said it was their desire to hear his explanation of the publication of the letter that had appeared in the *Mercury*. He must have been aware that such a communication was likely to cause great embarrassment and harm to the institution, which would be not a little aggravated by the public discovering the author to be one of their own surgeons.

Already the hospital had suffered financially, and he must see himself that such conduct imperatively called for an explanation, which he trusted it was in his power to give. 'For,' he said, 'I am bound to tell you, Mr Butcher, that if such an explanation be not forthcoming, the feeling that has arisen against you on this Board is of so strong a character as to make it undesirable that you should keep your present connection with the institution.'

Mr Butcher then entered upon a rambling statement as to his motives. He said he considered both his duty to the public and to the institution required him to use every means in his power to prevent operations such as these of Mr Armstrong's from being performed at the hospital.

'Are we to understand, sir?' said one of the Board, interrupting him, 'that you thought it your duty to raise the public against us to inaugurate a reform you had never brought to *our* notice, who are the appointed guardians of the institution?'

'I feared, sir,' was the reply, 'that the influence of some of my colleagues here'—and Mr Butcher looked in the direction of Sir George Hamilton—'would be too strong for me.'

'Even if that were so,' said the chairman, 'do you

mean to suggest that under any conceivable circumstances a trusted officer of the institution is justified in appealing to the public against its lawful governors, without bringing any grievance there might be first to their notice, so as at least to give them the option of redressing it? Your conduct, sir, seems to us very unnatural, and the Board cannot feel satisfied with such an explanation.'

Mr Butcher again signified that he had only acted in accordance with what he considered his public duty.

'Again, sir,' continued the chairman, 'you have made a serious charge against a colleague. We members of the public outside the profession do not understand the rules you maintain among yourselves, and it is desirable before coming to a decision on your conduct as one of our officers, to be informed as to your professional behaviour. Whether according to the ethics of your profession you have acted as one surgeon should towards another, we know of no person better fitted to give us information than Sir George Hamilton, who is one of your own colleagues, and a trusted member of this Board.'

There was a murmur of assent from all present.

The chairman turned to Sir George Hamilton. 'Sir George, may we ask you to enlighten us as to this strange behaviour of Mr Butcher, that is, from a professional point of view? We can ourselves decide the rest. Is such conduct regarded with approval by the medical profession?'

'Mr Chairman, and gentlemen,' was the reply, 'the question you have put is a painful one. It is always hard to condemn a colleague, but I cannot, consistently with the duty I owe my profession, be silent. No medical man could be justified in writing such a letter as that which appeared in the *Mercury*, and from a profes-

sional point of view Mr Butcher's explanation is not satisfactory.'

'You hear what Sir George Hamilton says, Mr Butcher?' and the chairman gave a contemptuous look in his direction.

'Sir George Hamilton's predilections for my opponent,' bitterly replied Mr Butcher, 'are but too well known!'

'When, and why did Mr Armstrong become your opponent?' asked several voices; and Mr Butcher did not find it easy to answer the question.

'I cannot see,' remarked the chairman, 'why the fact of Mr John Armstrong performing operations of which you disapprove, should make him your opponent. You are not in any way responsible for these operations. What private reasons you may have for attacking Mr Armstrong are nothing to the Board.' There was a touch of sarcasm in the latter suggestion, which Mr Butcher winced under, for it implied that the reason for his conduct was not of a public but a private nature.

Mr Butcher was then asked to retire, and was informed that the secretary would communicate to him later the Board's decision.

When he had withdrawn there was but little further discussion. A large majority considered Mr Butcher's conduct utterly unjustifiable, and a resolution was carried requesting his resignation, Sir George Hamilton, however, refusing to vote.

When a few weeks later it became publicly known of the impending action, John was also summoned before the Board.

'Is it true, Mr Armstrong,' asked the chairman, 'that you are bringing an action against your late colleague?'

'Yes, sir,' replied John, 'it is necessary for me to do so,

to publicly exonerate myself from the serious charge that has been made.'

'You have been badly treated, I admit, Mr Armstrong,' said the chairman, 'but do you really think such a step was necessary to vindicate yourself, after being so loyally supported by us and all your other colleagues?'

John faltered a little. He saw the force of this, and could only reply deprecatingly, 'that he had been so advised.'

'I can only say, then,' continued the chairman, 'we are grieved at the course you have thought fit to adopt. No doubt you are within your rights, but we had hoped you would have the magnanimity to submit to a little injustice, rather than run the risk of further injury to this institution, as is only too likely to follow from litigation. I may further add, that if the Board had known this before, they would have postponed their decision on the case of your late colleague till after the trial of your action.'

'Ah,' thought John as he left the Board room, 'Charley was right after all. If my action fails, the Board will be apt to regret their treatment of Butcher.'

CHAPTER XIII

ARMSTRONG *v.* BUTCHER

‘Let us consider the reason of the case—for nothing is law that is not reason.’

At length the day of the trial drew near, and John began to experience, only too truly, the worry and anxiety that Charley had foretold.

His sleep became more disturbed, and Edith was again alarmed at his behaviour. He would start up, and talk incoherently of things she did not understand; often with his face covered with sweat, as if in a state of terror.

He was also gloomy and reserved, and as his nervous system became lowered, there returned with increased persistency the memory of the Fritton tragedy, and the part he had played in it, and he would fancy that a Nemesis was at length beginning to find him out.

Mary Elliot’s face, the Morgue, visions of drowning people, and the finger of Butcher pointing scornfully at him, were the nightmares which terrified his slumber, and brought on the nervous attacks which so alarmed his wife.

‘I wish,’ he said on more than one occasion to himself, ‘I had not been so self-willed, and had desisted from this action. I did not think the Board would have required

Butcher's resignation. That was quite enough to set me right in the opinion of the world, but now, who knows what may come of it !'

It was in the early days of the Michaelmas sittings that the action *Armstrong v. Butcher* came on for hearing at the Royal Courts of Justice.

The court was crowded, as the case was of great public interest, and many prominent members of the medical profession were present. The Bar likewise were well represented.

Mr Benjamin Robbins, Q.C., was counsel for John, while his opponent's case was in the hands of Mr Montague Hartley, Q.C.

Both gentlemen were noted for their forensic talents, and when they were found on opposite sides great things were to be expected.

As the judge, Mr Justice Hammond, took his seat on the bench, the usher cried 'Silence,' and the business of calling the names of the special jury was commenced.

When this was concluded, Mr Robbins's junior rose and opened the pleadings. He then resumed his seat, and Mr Robbins proceeded with John's case.

With admirable clearness he put all the facts before the jury, explaining the respective positions of the plaintiff and defendant : how the latter was the elder surgeon, and was senior to the other, and had shown considerable ill-feeling at the rapid rise into celebrity of his junior. That his malicious attempts to injure John had culminated in the letter to the *Mercury* of June 18th last.

He read the letter, commenting on it, and pointing out the innuendoes it contained.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'the defendant comes before you with the plea that this letter is true, and at the first sight it may seem that there is a plausibility about the statements it publishes. But as one of our great poets has

written, "A lie which is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies," so I shall endeavour to prove that it is by false and libellous suggestions, put forward upon a certain modicum of truth, that my client is so deeply injured.

'For instance, it is a fact that the poor girl Mary Johnson was operated on by my client on the Wednesday, and died on the Thursday; but, from the whole tenor of the letter, it is suggested that the patient was improperly operated on, that the conduct of his brother surgeon was rash and unjustifiable.

'Where is the truth, too, in the allegation that the girl was admitted into St Barnabas a "few days ago"? I shall show you she was under my client's care a full fortnight before his operation, and during the whole of this time he gave her case the utmost consideration.'

Mr Robbins then called John into the witness box, who bore out his counsel's statements.

He explained the nature of Mary Johnson's disease, and described his operation. The fatal result was accidental, and such a result might follow the most trivial operations, without there being any fault on the part of the operator.

Questioned as to the behaviour of the defendant, he narrated the petty slights that had been put upon him, the refusal to see patients for him at the hospital in his absence, complaints to the hospital Board about his alleged unpunctuality in visiting the wards, and finally he recounted how the defendant had tried to take this case out of his hands, although it had been specially sent to him for operation.

When Mr Robbins had finished, Mr Montague Hartley rose to cross-examine, and John saw from the glance he gave him, as he faced round, and sharply threw back his gown, that he must now look out for squalls.

He commenced in the blindest possible tones.

'Will you kindly tell the court, Mr Armstrong, why you performed that operation.'

'Because,' replied John, 'I thought it the best treatment for my patient.'

With a look of incredulity, and deepening the tones of his voice, the counsel continued:—

'You *thought* it the best treatment, sir? What—to put her out of her misery, eh?'

'I don't understand you, sir!' was the indignant reply.

'Oh, you don't understand me, Mr Armstrong,' said the counsel with a sneer. 'I thought I was speaking plainly enough. Now, sir, didn't your patient die less than twenty-four hours after the operation? What was her death due to, if not to your operation?'

'Death may occur after any operation.'

'I did not ask you that!' thundered the counsel, 'but whether the death of this girl was, or was not due to your operation?'

John felt himself in a difficulty. It was not by any means easy to rebut the presumption that his interrogator was so vehemently pressing against him, that the death of his patient had been the immediate consequence of his operation.

So he answered with hesitation, 'That it might have been.'

'Might have been,' contemptuously echoed the other, following up his advantage. 'Is that all you have to say? Come, sir, would not that unhappy girl have been living now, if you had been less hasty?'

'I cannot say.'

Mr Montague Hartley then bore down on another quarter.

'Has the operation you performed ever been done before in this country?'

'No, it has not.'

'You stated, when my learned friend was examining you, that fatal results may follow the most trivial operation. Was *this* a trivial operation?'

'No.'

'Was it a dangerous one?'

'Not generally speaking.'

'What, sir! think what you are saying! Not a dangerous operation to open the interior of the body?'

John did not flinch, but replied deliberately—

'It has been done many times without the smallest ill effects.'

'Now, Mr Armstrong, I put this to you:—Was the disease from which your patient was suffering likely to kill her if she had not been operated upon?'

'No.'

'Or to seriously shorten her life?'

'Perhaps not.'

'Yet, sir, you performed a dangerous operation?'

'I said, sir, that the operation was not, generally speaking, a dangerous one.'

Mr Hartley at this juncture stooped down, and whispered a few words to Mr Butcher, who was sitting immediately below him. On receiving an answer, he once more addressed himself to John:—

'You told my learned friend, Mr Armstrong, you never before had had so unfortunate a case?'

'I did.'

'Do you remember Martha Roberts, a patient on whom you performed a dangerous operation some time ago?'

'I do.'

'How long after the operation did that patient live?'

'About six months.'

Again there was a whispered colloquy between Mr Hartley and his client, while John ground his teeth, for he saw through the design of his opponent.

'Do you remember John Tomlin, Mr Armstrong?' continued the counsel. 'You operated upon him likewise, did you not?'

'Yes.'

'How long did he live afterwards?'

'I believe about three months.'

'Might I ask, Mr Armstrong, whether it is usual for members of the hospital staff to consult with colleagues before doing dangerous operations?'

'It is a frequent practice.'

'Why did not you follow this wholesome custom?'

'Because,' said John with a look of scorn at Butcher, 'the only one of my colleagues then available for consultation was the defendant, and I did not choose to give him an opportunity of insulting me.'

Mr Robbins then rose, and endeavoured to undo some of the mischief of this cross-examination.

'My learned friend, Mr Armstrong, alluded to the case of Martha Roberts. Was her death in consequence of your operation?'

'Certainly not.'

'Was it in any way accelerated by it?'

'No. That case was hopeless from the first, and the operation was never intended to be more than palliative, and it probably lengthened her life some months.'

'Then as to the case of John Tomlin,' continued Mr Robbins.

'I successfully removed a malignant growth from the

patient's kidney, giving him great relief, and his death was due to a recurrence of the disease.'

'I think you said, Mr Armstrong, the operation on Mary Johnson had never been done before in this country. Is it known abroad?'

'Yes, it has been frequently performed in America, France, and Germany.'

During the whole of this examination and cross-examination, the eyes of all had been on John, who had borne up bravely under the ordeal, and had found out to his cost that counsel—as Alice had told his wife—could say nasty things.

On the whole he had answered discreetly, in spite of the irritating course pursued.

He retired from the witness box, and Professor Goldstein, an eminent German surgeon, and lecturer on surgery at the University of Vienna, was next called.

'I believe, Professor, you are attached to the University of Vienna,' said Mr Robbins. 'Is the operation done by Mr Armstrong known to you?'

'Yes, we know the operation very well.'

'You have heard all about Mary Johnson's case?' The witness nodded. 'Now, from the character and history of her symptoms, do you think an operation was required?'

'Yes, certainly.'

'What operation would you have done?'

'The operation of Mr Armstrong. That is the right operation.'

'Ah, Professor, you were present, I think, and saw Mr Armstrong operate. Do you think the death of the patient was in any way the fault of the operator?'

The witness held up his hands in admiration.

'The operation was splendid! But the surgeon can

only do the best ; the patient may die when the best is done.'

Mr Hartley rose with a decidedly vicious look.

'You say, Professor, you have often performed this operation at Vienna. How many times have you known it done there?'

'One, two, three times,' said Professor Goldstein, counting on his fingers.

'Did any of the patients die?' queried Mr Hartley, with a significant look towards the jury.

'One died just as the girl here died.'

'So one out of three died! Don't you call it a dangerous operation where one out of three dies?'

The Professor gravely shook his head, as if not quite comprehending the drift of the question, and then replied :—

'The operation may be dangerous, but it is the right operation.'

Mr Henry Newton was next called. He was one of the surgeons to St Hilary's, and a very brilliant operator.

But although he spoke highly of John's skill, and gave it as his opinion that the operation was rightly done, and that he would most assuredly have done it himself ; the effect of his evidence was weakened by admissions elicited by Mr Hartley in cross-examination, from which it was made to appear to the jury that Mr Newton himself was not the most discreet of operators, but was prone to operate in season and out of season—in short, whenever he got the chance.

John's house-surgeon was called, who proved that he informed the defendant that Mary Johnson had been sent to Mr Armstrong, and that the defendant paid no attention, but directed the patient to be taken into his ward. He further proved that the defendant had never

examined Mary Johnson, and was not present at the *post-mortem* examination.

'I believe,' said Mr Hartley to the witness, 'that it is customary at St Barnabas for patients admitted there to go under the surgeon for the week. Was not Mr Butcher on duty that week?'

'Yes,' was the reply, 'but it is not customary for the surgeon on duty to keep a case sent up to one of his colleagues.'

The last witness for the plaintiff was Sir George Hamilton, the consulting surgeon to St Barnabas.

He spoke very highly of John as a skilful surgeon, and a man of justly high rank as an operator, but was guarded as to expressing approval of the operation on Mary Johnson.

'Do you think, Sir George,' said Mr Robbins, 'that Mr Armstrong did wrong in operating?'

'I have no doubt that Mr Armstrong acted according to his conscience, and thought to benefit his patient.'

John's counsel saw he was on treacherous ground, and that little good was likely to be derived from questions in this direction; so he passed to another point.

'On what terms were the plaintiff and defendant?'

'The relations between them were not friendly.'

'Has the defendant, to your knowledge, complained to the hospital board of Mr Armstrong?'

'He has made several complaints.'

'Did the board of St Barnabas hold an inquiry with regard to this letter to the *Mercury*?'

'Yes.'

'What was the outcome of that inquiry?'

'The defendant was required to resign his connection with the hospital.'

Mr Robbins finished, and Mr Hartley at once got up to take advantage of some of the witness's answers.

Turning to him in tones of the greatest confidence, he said, 'Sir George Hamilton, we all know you, and we could not have a better opinion than yours. Now, with regard to this operation on Mary Johnson, would *you* have performed it?'

There was a moment's hesitation; then came deliberately the reply, 'No.'

'Do you approve of operations of this kind?'

'*I* do not.' There was an emphasis on the first word, as if to indicate that he was only recording his own view of the subject.

But his answer was eagerly received by defendant's counsel, who continued:—

'Do you consider such operations justifiable?'

'Certainly they may be so at times.'

'At what times?'

'Here again was a poser, but the witness with the slightest possible hesitation replied:—

'When the surgeon, in whose charge the patient is, honestly thinks that good may be derived from them.'

Mr Hartley had not been quite so successful as he desired, and thought it might be better to leave well alone, so he shifted to another point.

'You told my learned friend, Sir George, that my client was required to resign in consequence of this letter. Were you a member of the board that inquired into the matter?'

'I was.'

'Do you think the board were acting fairly and justly, in judging my client's case in the way they did, knowing this action was going to be tried?'

'The hospital board did not know of this action.'

'Now, Sir George, I put it to you, if an officer of a

public institution honestly considers that its welfare is being very seriously jeopardised, has he no right to appeal to the public whose trustees the board are?'

'No, sir,' said the witness emphatically, 'he can always resign if he choose, and show the public he is dissatisfied with its management.'

Mr Hartley sat down. He had certainly made a point, for the evident dislike of the witness for the operation performed had its effect on the jury.

Sir George Hamilton's reputation was long established, and his name had great weight with the public.

For the defence several well-known surgeons were called, who strongly condemned the operation. On cross-examination, however, they admitted the operation might sometimes be justifiable, according to the special requirements of the case. They, moreover, confessed they knew nothing, except from hearsay, about Mary Johnson and the disease from which she suffered, and that the surgeon in attendance was the best judge of what his patient required.

At this point the court adjourned, and John returned home utterly unfit for professional work. Edith eagerly inquired as to the events of the day.

'Do you think you will win, John?' she said anxiously. 'How worried you look, I'm afraid this trial will make you ill.'

'Oh, no, dear, I'm just a little fagged—that's all. The court is in my favour, I think.'

He scarcely tasted dinner, and after the meal, retired to his study, ostensibly to look over the proofs of a medical book he was editing, but in reality to sit down moodily, and smoke.

About nine o'clock Charley called, and was surprised to see the depressed state into which his brother-in-law had fallen.

'Why, what is the matter?' he inquired, 'one would think you had lost the action.'

'Well, old fellow,' said his friend, 'don't you think the action is as good as lost? What chance have I after Sir George Hamilton's evidence? I did think he was my friend.'

'So he is, and I think he has acted the part of a friend. I don't see how he could have done more. You surely didn't expect him to perjure himself to assist your case?'

'Oh, come, Charley, you lawyers, as a rule, are not over-scrupulous.'

'Pardon me,' replied the other a little warmly, 'our profession as well as your own contains honourable men, and I have yet to learn that a solicitor would counsel a witness to lie.'

'Well, well, Charley, I don't want to hurt your feelings. How do you think the case stands?'

'As to that,' rejoined Charley, 'I have just left Robbins, and we have been carefully considering the matter. We both think Butcher won't win. The jury are no doubt disgusted with his behaviour. He has not dared to go into the witness box, and then his dismissal from St Barnabas tells against him—that was rather rough on him,' he added. 'Did you notice how sore Hartley was on the point, and how angry with the hospital board? We shall hear more about that when he addresses the jury. But as to the result—' and the speaker looked anxiously at John, who had unmistakably brightened up at his friend's words—'there's one danger that must be faced. The jury may disagree. You see the operation was unfortunate. Hartley is sure to make a lot of that, and the average juror is just the sort of man to be impressed by him. Then it can't be denied the medical evidence on the whole is against

the operation. Professor Goldstein and Newton did not do you much good, and Sir George Hamilton, anxious as he was not to prejudice your case, could not approve of it. So, if we fail, depend on it, it will be through disagreement of the jury. But, cheer up, John! Don't look so confoundedly glum! At least, wait till to-morrow, and whichever way it goes, you are likely to come out of it without serious injury.'

'Thanks, old fellow, for your consolation,' said the other, making a not very successful attempt to rouse himself from his state of despondency, 'we will wait till to-morrow!'

They then went to the drawing-room, where Charley was surprised to find his wife with Edith.

'You didn't expect to find me here, did you,' she remarked, 'but I had dinner with the Beechams in Brook Street, and as I thought you would be calling on John to-night, I came for you to escort me home. Why, John,' she continued, noticing his look of worry and evident depression, 'if the action is going to last long, it will about kill you!'

'Oh, it won't last long,' said that gentleman, making an effort to smile, 'it will be all over to-morrow.'

'How's little John?' said Charley to his sister.

'Not very well,' was the reply.

'John not very well?' said her husband hastily, 'what's wrong with him, dear?'

'He has that dreadful cough again. He was coughing all night. You know he disturbed you.'

'Yes, yes, I remember he did cough a good deal last night,' said John, throwing himself down on a sofa, 'I must get Noble to have a look at him.' The latter was a medical friend residing in the neighbourhood. John had been for some time past rather anxious about his son, who had shown signs of weakness about his chest.

'Don't worry about the boy, Edith,' said her brother cheerfully, 'you pamper him too much. The last recollection I have of the little man, is the healthy way in which he got outside some plum cake a short time ago.'

On the next day the court was more than ever crowded, as it was pretty well understood the case would be concluded.

The defendant wisely did not go into the box, but his plea throughout was justification, one very difficult to succeed upon, especially when the truth has been more or less highly coloured by personal feelings.

All the witnesses had been examined, and a crowded court was waiting with the greatest interest to see how the two eminent counsel would put the case to the jury.

A pin might almost have been heard to fall as Mr Hartley rose. He laid great emphasis on the character of the operation, which, according to the evidence, was of a more than questionable character.

'The public,' he said, 'are gravely interested in putting down dangerous experiments of this kind. They are, in fact, a sort of vivisection, and such as no conscientious surgeon ought to perform. What would be your feelings, gentlemen,' he said, with a pathetic wave of his hand to the jury, 'if one of your daughters had consulted the plaintiff, and, influenced by the power that every medical man of the plaintiff's standing has over a patient and a patient's friends, you had consented to such an operation, only to find death to follow within a few hours?'

'For, mark you this—it was not a case in which immediate danger was to be feared. The evidence shows clearly that nothing more serious than inconvenience, and possibly a little pain at times, was to

be apprehended in the future. What is Sir George Hamilton's evidence on this point, whom we all know so well? In spite of his obvious predilections for the plaintiff, he was compelled to condemn the operation.

'As to the evidence of Mr Newton, little need be said. It is fortunate there are not more of his class at large, or we might all be walking about without one of our limbs.

'With regard to Professor Goldstein, we know what little sympathy is too often shown towards the patient at Continental hospitals, which are likewise the chief centres of vivisection.

'Much has been said to the prejudice of my client, respecting the unprofessional character of his letter to the *Mercury*; but, gentlemen, nice rules of etiquette in any profession cannot be allowed to prevail when the public interests are at stake.

'I must protest, also, against the conduct of the board of St Barnabas in requiring my client's resignation, when such an action as this was pending. Their behaviour amounted almost to a contempt of court.

'My client had been for many years connected with St Barnabas, and had great regard for that institution. He had only too good reason to fear the harm likely to be brought upon it through public opprobrium, if such operations were to continue to be performed without protest. It has been alleged that his proper course would have been to approach the board, and I do not deny there is some weight in this as a general contention. But my client knew too well the character of this body, and the plaintiff's interest there: and in the light of what has occurred since, can it be denied that his presumptions were well founded?

'Was it unnatural, then, that under the circumstances he

should appeal to the public, who after all are the parties chiefly interested in the proper administration of our medical charities? It is to the public he himself, and the board, are equally responsible.

‘Gentlemen, I trust I have put my client’s conduct in the true light, and that you will by your verdict show how much you disapprove of reckless operations at our public institutions, and are ready to protect those who fearlessly speak out against them.’

Some sensation was produced in court as Mr Hartley finished, and John felt his blood boil at the innuendoes.

He eagerly looked towards Mr Robbins, who was preparing to give the jury his version of the case.

That gentleman was leaning over the desk behind him, whispering to his junior, when his opponent finished; but before the excitement created by the latter’s speech had subsided, he was on his feet facing the jury, and ready for action.

‘May it please your lordship, and gentlemen of the jury, my client comes before you to vindicate an honourable reputation, and to claim damages for malicious aspersions on professional skill, made under the pretence of performing a public duty.

‘You have all heard the way in which my learned friend has not scrupled to speak of my client, whose name as a surgeon is a household word, not only in London, but all over England. Indeed, I should not be exaggerating, if I were to say his fame is world-wide.

‘For some years he has practised in our midst, and at St Barnabas has taken the position of the foremost operator of the day. Gentlemen, of all professional men to whom the public owe so much, to none are they more indebted than to those in the position of my client. Theirs is an anxious calling, a calling which only too frequently lays them open to the censures and carpings

of malevolent criticism. Often by their skill and knowledge the life of the patient is renewed, and many a home in this country has had occasion to bless the name of Mr John Armstrong, for the restoration to the family circle of those they had given over as lost almost beyond hope.

‘But, gentlemen, this cannot always be! Human art and skill are limited! The greatest surgeon that ever lived could not expect his operations always to be successful.

‘How mean and cowardly, then, is the conduct of that person, who, regardless of the difficulties under which the surgeon invariably labours, even where no care has been spared on his part, spitefully pillories him before the public on account of unavoidable disaster!

‘Gentlemen, were this done by the friends of the patient, smarting under their recent loss, we might be inclined to look more leniently on their injustice. Were it done on some fancied ground of public duty by a member of the non-professional class, ignorant of the practice of surgery, extenuating circumstances might possibly be imagined.

‘But what are we to think, when an attack is made on an eminent surgeon by a professional brother through an anonymous letter in the public press! And at that time, too, he was a colleague of my client, on the staff of the same hospital. I say at that time, for the committee have since required his resignation.

‘Gentlemen, on May 16th last, this young woman was sent up from the country, by the rector of the parish in which she resided, to see my client professionally, and to be admitted under his care at St Barnabas.

‘The evidence has shown you how the defendant, regardless of all professional courtesy, endeavoured to secure the patient for himself, so that it is apparent there

is personal resentment on the defendant's part from the first.

'The symptoms under which the patient was suffering were obscure. It was possible she was suffering from a fatal disease, and even if it were not so, that her future was likely to be a miserable one, if unrelieved by operation. My client carefully considered her case, examined her many times, and for more than a fortnight she occupied one of his beds, while he deliberated as to the best mode of treatment.

'When at length an operation was determined on, all the risks were explained to the patient and her parents; and competent observers who were present have told you how skilfully and carefully that operation was performed. It was unfortunately not successful, and the patient succumbed on the next day to what is known as "shock," and is, we are told, an accident which may occur after any operation.

'You will observe, gentlemen, how in the letter the defendant takes pains to depreciate the symptoms from which the poor girl suffered, although it has been proved in evidence that he never examined her professionally. At the time he wrote that letter, too, he knew nothing, except from hearsay, of the facts of the *post-mortem* examination.

'Gentlemen, you have doubtless been much edified by my learned friend's able dissertation on the public duty performed by the defendant. Do you think he *was* swayed by any thought of public duty, when he wrote that letter?

'Is it for the public good that one officer of a public institution should anonymously libel another in the press? What advantage are the public likely to gain from it? What regard could the defendant have had for truth, when he made these serious allegations without troubling to make himself conversant with the facts of the case?

'No, gentlemen, it has been my client's successes in operating, not his disasters, which have aroused the defendant's ire, and I trust you will not fail to show by your verdict, that you know how to express your disapprobation, when one professional man perverts truth for the purpose of injuring another.'

As the counsel resumed his seat John felt happier. At least, his case had been fairly put, and Mr Robbins' eloquence had not been without its effect on the court.

Mr Justice Hammond summed up. He said this was an action between two well-known surgeons, in which one claimed damages for a letter published in the *Mercury*, which he alleged to be libellous.

He was sorry such an action had been brought, for it was calculated to injure St Barnabas, the well-being of which was of the utmost importance to the public.

As to the letter, it was clearly libellous, so that it only remained to consider whether justification could be made out; in other words, were the allegations contained in the letter written by the defendant strictly true? He must warn the jury not to be led astray by sensational incidents connected with the case. The rapid death of Mary Johnson after the operation was a sad circumstance, but if the operation were rightly done, he failed to see how the operator could be held answerable for the disaster.

Then as to the right of doing the operation, that was entirely for the surgeon to decide, in whom the patient had placed his or her trust. If the patient and the patient's friends had consented, it would require exceedingly strong reasons to warrant outsiders in interfering. In his opinion, it would not be for the public good to fetter the hands of the surgeon, and put obstacles in the way of his using the utmost of his skill and knowledge to relieve his patient.

There would be little encouragement to do so, if he were liable to be pilloried in the press for every unsuccessful operation that happened to be a little novel, and did not meet with the approval of a rival.

He must caution the jury that when a party published statements injuriously affecting another, it was very necessary that they should be scrupulously true. That they who departed in the least from the truth, did so at their peril, when these statements were made the means of gratifying spite.

In conclusion he said, 'It is admitted, gentlemen, that the publication of this letter was a libel, so that it only remains for you to say whether the statements contained therein were true in substance and in fact. If, however, you are of opinion that although there is a certain amount of truth, the facts dealt with have been so garbled and exaggerated by the defendant, as to unfairly prejudice the plaintiff's reputation, then the defendant fails in his plea, and it remains for you to assess damages; and there can be no doubt that if you find the libel was not justified, you may award substantial damages.'

The jury left the box, and a hum of conversation immediately arose. Every one wondered what the verdict would be.

The summing up had been in John's favour, and he eagerly watched the door through which the jurors had retired, expecting their return.

Several of his friends came and spoke encouragingly.

'It's all right, Armstrong,' said Mr James Morley, one of his colleagues, 'I wonder how much they'll make that cad Butcher pay! They can only punish him through his pocket. What do you think, Mr Dawson?'

Charley was sitting next to John. 'It's impossible to say,' he answered, 'but I suppose it will be something under £5000.'

'If I had the assessing of the damages I would make Butcher pay every penny,' said Mr Morley emphatically.

Half-an-hour had elapsed, and the jury were still absent. Charley looked significantly at John. 'I'm afraid there's some difference of opinion,' he said. 'You look ill, John. Why don't you go home, I'll let you know the result at once.'

To John the court seemed moving up and down, and he answered mechanically questions addressed to him.

'No, I must and will stay and hear the result.'

At the end of another half-hour the foreman of the jury returned into court, to know if the verdict of the majority would be taken.

Mr Hartley objected. 'No, my lord,' he said, 'I cannot advise my client to consent to that.'

'You see, Mr Foreman,' said the judge, 'the parties are not willing to accept your proposal, so I must ask you to consult a little longer.'

At the end of another half-hour the foreman once more returned, and said there was no chance of the jury agreeing. The judge, therefore, ordered them back into court.

'Is there any way in which I can assist you, gentlemen?' he asked.

'I fear, my lord,' replied the foreman, 'our difference is too great to be got over.'

'If that is so,' said Mr Justice Hammond, 'it only remains for me to discharge you.'

'Ah, John,' said Charley, as they left the court, 'it has happened, as I feared, but I feel sure the majority of the jury are with you. You'll be none the worse for the trial, except a little money out of pocket, and the worry you have undergone. You won't be in such a hurry to litigate another time.'

John's carriage was waiting outside. They entered it, and drove to Cavendish Square.

'I suppose,' said John, as the carriage rolled along, 'you wouldn't advise me to go on?'

'Advise you to go on?' said Charley sarcastically. 'Don't you think, man, you have had enough? I can assure you, you are well out of it. It would be madness to proceed further in the matter.'

On arriving at the house, Charley asked to be driven to Portland Road railway station. 'I shall soon be at my office then. I ought not to have returned with you, for I had quite forgotten some important business that must be seen to at once. I put it off on account of this trial.'

'Very well, old fellow, if you won't come in, good-bye,' and John alighted, and directed his coachman to drive Charley as he desired.

On entering the house he asked where his wife was.

'If you please, sir,' said a servant, 'she's up in Master John's room. He has been very ill, and mistress sent for Dr Noble.'

On entering the room, Edith cried out between sobs, 'Oh, John, look there, the child has been bringing up blood.' She pointed to a handkerchief deeply stained, that she held in her hands.

Dr Noble was standing by the bedside with his stethoscope applied to the little patient's chest. He turned his head as John entered, and exclaimed, 'Oh, you are come, Armstrong, I'm glad of that. The youngster has had a little hæmoptysis, but I tell Mrs Armstrong, she need not be so much alarmed. He will soon be better.'

'Noble is quite right, dear,' said John, taking his wife's hand, which trembled excessively. 'Why, you're altogether upset, Edith, I shall have to get a nurse to attend to the child.'

'No, no, John! I won't let any one nurse him but myself!'

'Then, you must compose yourself, dear,' said her husband, trying to calm her agitation.

'Me better now, mother, me want to get up,' said a small voice from the bed.

'So you shall by-and-bye, little man,' said Dr. Noble, patting the child's head.

Dr. Noble, who was a personal friend, and lived close by, had been summoned by Edith directly the attack came on.

'It was kind of you to come so promptly, Noble,' said John to the latter, as he shook hands with him at the street door. 'Misfortunes never come singly. I've just lost my action too.'

'I'm only too glad to be of service, Armstrong,' replied the other, 'but I'm sorry to hear your news. How came it to happen? I thought from the paper yesterday you had by far the better case.'

'Well, I should perhaps say,' said John, 'the jury have disagreed, but that is next door to losing the action.'

'Not quite so bad,' replied his friend. 'But I am sorry Butcher has got off so easily. Let me know how your son gets on, and command me at any time, when I can be of assistance. Good afternoon.'

CHAPTER XIV

THE REV. JAMES PAGET RETURNS FROM INDIA

‘ Though the mills of God grind slowly,
They grind exceeding small ;
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all.’

It is evening on the Hooghly. A cool wind has just risen, which is beginning to temper the tropical day, now hurrying to its close.

The Peninsular and Oriental steamer, *Ceylon*, is rapidly getting up steam, and in half-an-hour will be speeding away seawards, homeward bound.

On the right is the modern city of Calcutta, with Fort William and the Government House standing out prominently, and between the steamer and the shore numerous boats are plying, bringing or carrying away goods or passengers.

The Oriental jargon of the dark-skinned natives is heard on all sides, and not infrequently an English oath of a nautical character, as some in their desire to do business trespass on forbidden parts of the ship.

On the deck two men are walking up and down, engaged in earnest conversation. One, already known to the reader, is the Rev. James Paget, looking more sallow and thinner, but otherwise not altered from when

we saw him last at Norwich. The other, an older man with long flowing beard rapidly becoming grey, is Bishop Jackson, as whose chaplain Mr Paget had come to India.

At this moment the bell of the *Ceylon* sounds as a warning of impending departure, and the increased throbbing of the engines shows that their latent energy is soon to be transformed into work.

'My dear Paget,' said the elder of the two, 'I shall indeed miss you. God gave me in you a helpmate I am not likely to find again, and what success He has blessed me with in my work here is not a little due to your assistance.'

'Thank you, my lord,' said the other, 'for your kind appreciation of my humble services. I hope you do not think I am willingly leaving you now. You tell me I ought to be ruled by the opinion of my medical adviser, and you have had the greatest influence in making me agree to follow his direction.'

'True, true, Paget,' replied the bishop, 'your life is far too valuable to be wantonly sacrificed, and after your physician's decided opinion, I think it is your duty to return to England, where, doubtless, God will find plenty of work for you.'

Again the bell of the steamer sounded, and the hoarse, shrill whistle, showing there would be little longer delay.

'I wish you "God speed," my dear fellow,' he continued, shaking him warmly by the hand, 'and I trust one day, when my work is done, that I may see you again in our dear native land. In the meanwhile, I have written to the Bishop of Norwich, and have some hope he may present you to the Rectory of Fritton, now vacant by the death of your old friend, Mr Dawes.'

'My lord, it is very good of you to take such kind interest in my future,' said Mr Paget warmly, as the

bishop stepped on to the ladder descending to the tender, which took ashore those not meaning to sail in the *Ceylon*, 'I shall never forget your kindness.'

The bishop smiled and waved an adieu, as the screw began to revolve, and the *Ceylon* slowly moved down the Hooghly. Soon all trace of the city was lost, hidden by the luxuriant vegetation of the river banks.

James Paget paced the deck, thinking of all he had gone through since he was last in England.

He had enthusiastically thrown himself into his work, and during Bishop Jackson's illness, which had occurred shortly after his arrival at Calcutta, he had performed many of the duties of the latter. He had been very popular with the natives, whose language he had acquired, and by his own personal influence had not a little contributed to the success of the mission.

His health, however, had latterly shown signs of giving way, and had excited the apprehension of his friends. Indeed, Surgeon-major Stanby had roundly told him that he would not live another year in India. It was little more than five years since he left England, and he had scarcely communicated with his friends during that period.

He had seen in scientific journals accounts of John's rising success, and he wondered how Edith was, and whether her new life had turned out a happy one. He sincerely hoped it had, and far from feeling any selfish regret at having lost her himself, his only fear was lest she might have been mistaken in her estimate of John's character, and regret it when too late.

'She loved him well enough in those days,' he mused, thinking of the old time in Norwich; 'if ever a woman loved, she loved Armstrong. But did he love her? I never felt certain on that point. He did not love her at the time of that trip to Yarmouth, when the unfortunate

girl Elliot met with the accident. Did he love her later, when he married her? If his love be not real, she will surely find it out some day, and then—'

'It's a fine evening, Mr Paget,' said a voice at his side, 'and cool, too, after the stifling heat of the morning.'

'Yes, it is pleasant, Mr Boyes,' replied the clergyman, turning round to his interrogator, and recognising a portly London merchant, whom he had more than once met in society in Calcutta, and who had recently come out to India on business, and was now returning. 'You will be glad to get back to the old country, won't you, although your stay here has not been long?'

'Quite long enough, a month or two longer and I don't think I should have had a liver.'

'My dear Mr Boyes,' said Mr Paget, 'I have been here five years, and still believe I possess that necessary organ.'

'You don't look much the better for your stay,' retorted the other, 'and I should think you wouldn't be sorry to be back once more in England.'

James Paget sighed as he thought that the speaker had a happy home, and wife and children to return to, who were anxiously expecting him, and counting the days before his arrival. But, who would feel happier for *his* return? 'Ah, Mr Boyes,' he said, 'your family will be glad to have you back again.'

'Yes, they will,' complacently replied the other, 'and to tell the truth, Mr Paget, I'm a little anxious to get back. Only yesterday a wire came to say my youngest girl, the very darling of my heart, while crossing the road, had been knocked down by a cab, and has had her back severely injured.'

'My dear sir, I'm sorry to hear this,' said Mr Paget sympathetically, 'I do hope the matter after all will turn out not to be serious.'

'The wire told me,' continued Mr Boyes, 'that Armstrong had been called in,—you have heard of Armstrong the well-known London surgeon?—He had some doubts as to the case, and thought that an operation might be required. I wired back that nothing was to be done till my return.'

'But surely,' said the other, 'if the surgeon think the operation necessary, you might jeopardise your daughter's safety by fettering his hands. I suppose you have confidence in Mr Armstrong?'

Mr Boyes looked a little puzzled, and answered with some hesitation, 'My poor little Polly! I would do anything rather than endanger her safety.'

Then drawing closer to Mr Paget, he said abruptly :—

'Did you, sir, ever know Mr Armstrong the surgeon?'

'Why do you ask? As a matter of fact I once knew him intimately, but I don't see how you should know that.'

'I thought, sir, from your expression,' said Mr Boyes, 'when you heard his name, you knew something about him. Did you hear anything of the celebrated libel action last year?'

'No,' replied Mr Paget, starting, 'I'm afraid I've neglected the newspapers a good deal.'

'Well, you see,' said the other, 'Armstrong was publicly accused by a colleague at St Barnabas of causing the death of a patient there by performing an improper operation, so he brought an action against his accuser; but the jury disagreed, so that it would seem there must have been some who thought Armstrong had not done right. I took his part all through, and was one of the governors of St Barnabas, and did my best to get Mr Butcher, his maligner, off the hospital staff, for we all considered that his behaviour was only prompted by envy caused by Armstrong's rapid success. I was

present in court when the action was tried, and I can't forget some of the remarks of the counsel who defended Butcher. He asked the jury how they would feel, if Mr Armstrong had operated on one of their own daughters, who had died in consequence less than twenty-four hours afterwards. I thought of this, sir, when I heard of Polly's accident, and that Mr Armstrong had been called in. Do you think he would be likely to act, as the counsel pretended he did in that case?

'My dear sir,' replied Mr Paget, 'from what I remember of Armstrong, I should say certainly not; so I trust you will not worry about it any further. And when we get to Aden, I should advise you to wire, and say that everything is to be done according to Mr Armstrong's directions.'

'Thank you very much, Mr Paget,' said the other, 'you have greatly relieved my mind. I'm glad I spoke to you on the subject.'

'Has Mr Armstrong any family?' asked Mr Paget.

'Yes, one son, who I believe is very delicate, for I heard a bad report about him just before I came away. He had an attack of blood-spitting.'

So, then, this was Edith's child. Poor girl, how she must feel as a mother! He thought he would lose no time in calling on her when he got to England.

He replied, 'I'm sorry to hear this. It must be a terrible trial for parents to see their first, and perhaps, only child, fading before their eyes. It seems all the harder too, when it is the child of a great surgeon, who has often saved other people's children, and finds that his own he cannot save.'

'Yes, it is,' said Mr Boyes, a little huskily. 'I told Armstrong, the last time I saw him at the hospital, I was sorry to hear his youngster was so badly,

and he thanked me, but looked so gloomy and depressed. He's a wonderful man, though, and a good many think him the best surgeon in London.'

'I always thought he had great parts,' said Mr Paget sadly; but at this moment some other friends of Mr Boyes approached, and the conversation was interrupted.

The passage to England was uneventful, but Mr Boyes and Mr Paget became very friendly, and on parting at Southampton the former warmly shook the clergyman by the hand, and, giving him his card, assured him how pleased he would be to entertain him at his house at Richmond.

On arriving in England, Mr Paget first made his way to Norwich, where his old vicar invited him to stay with him as long as he found it convenient. 'I think, however, my dear fellow,' he said, 'you won't have to wait long for a settled habitation, for I have heard some news touching the appointment to the vacant Fritton Rectory, and you must call at the palace.'

A few days later the Rev. James Paget called at Bishopsthorpe.

He was received kindly by the bishop. 'My dear sir,' said the latter, warmly shaking him by the hand, 'after my old friend Jackson's report, I think it only my duty to offer you the vacant living. By your steady work and devotion to the church you have well-earned this preferment, and by making you rector of Fritton I feel I shall merit the hearty thanks of every parishioner there.'

Mr Paget made a suitable acknowledgment to the bishop, and a few weeks later, the name of the Rev. James Paget appeared in the *Times* as the new rector of Fritton.

Both Charley and John saw the announcement, but the effect on each was very different.

'By Jove,' said the former one morning to his wife at breakfast, 'Paget is back from India, and close to Norwich. He is the new rector of Fritton.'

'How I wish he were our rector,' replied his wife.

John did not make any remark to Edith, but thought with dread of the possibility of Paget hearing from old Joe an account of his former relations with Mary Elliot. 'He always was High Church,' he thought, 'and in favour of auricular confession. What influence may he not have over that old man!'

Strangely enough his fears in this direction were not unfounded, as will be seen by the sequel.

Edith chanced to see the announcement a little later, and drew her husband's attention to it. The latter made only one or two commonplace remarks, so that her indignation was aroused. 'How can you speak like that John? He was one of my best friends, and yours too. I shall be glad to see him again.'

One of the first things Mr Paget did on becoming settled, was to call on Dr and Mrs Dawson at Norwich.

They were old now, but received him kindly, and his sympathy was specially grateful to the latter, who was very infirm from ill-health. As her daughter was safely married, and there was no chance of her being carried off by a penniless curate, the former suspicion had long ago subsided.

She remembered, however, he had been fond of Edith in the past, and she found that he listened with the greatest interest when she chatted on about her daughter.

The clergyman heard with sorrow how correct had proved to be his conjectures, and that there was, and had always been, some rift between John and his wife. A true lover himself, he correctly divined that John had

not really loved his wife. Had *he* been beloved by Edith there could have been no rift.

As Mrs Dawson gossiped on, he was able to form a good notion of what Edith's life had been.

'I have sometimes thought,' said Mrs Dawson peevishly, 'that John cares more for his profession than his wife, and although Edith never complains, I feel sure she does not think she is rightly used. Now, poor girl, she is chiefly anxious about young John. He is getting, oh, so thin! If anything happens to him, Mr Paget, it will almost kill the mother!'

'God forbid!' said the clergyman, 'I hope the child will grow stronger. I have heard delicate children often make strong men. Is there any definite disease?'

'Consumption is feared. My husband often shakes his head, and wishes there were more children. You know, Charley has three. Such beautiful children, two boys and one girl, and nothing ailing with any of them. All are as strong as little John seems weak. How strange it is.'

'Yes,' said Mr Paget, 'who shall explain the working of Providence!' In his own mind he seemed to see the personal handiwork of Divinity, for His own good purpose so ordaining this difference in the families. He did not sift things from a scientific point, according to the views of modern evolution. Had he done so, might not the result have been but little dissimilar?

John's only child, and his delicacy may have been the natural outcome of the moral distress of the father: and the physical and moral health of Charley may have had a corresponding effect in producing a healthy progeny.

Darwin's law, no less than the Scriptural, inculcates that 'the sins of the parents shall be visited on the children unto the third and fourth generation.'

As the clergyman was leaving, Mrs Dawson asked him

whether he would be calling on John? She was sure Edith would be glad to see him. 'You know,' she added, 'you were always a favourite of hers.'

James Paget's heart began to beat more quickly, and the blood came to his face, but the eyes of age were not so sharp as formerly, and it passed unnoticed.

'I have been asked to preach at St Philip's, Mayfair, next Thursday week,' he replied, 'and I shall be in London for a day or two, when I will take the opportunity of calling.'

In the meantime, things had not been going on well at Cavendish Square. The action of a year ago had not greatly injured John professionally. His talents were such, that his superiority in his calling was universally recognised, and when this is so, professional success is assured.

He had just been called to attend a member of the Royal Family, and a title might be expected at a no distant period. But his great trouble was at home. His only child, the one object in which both Edith's love and his own coincided, in which alone their hearts had truly come together, was too obviously treading the downward path.

It was a double grief to Edith; for she felt that through the child came the chief hold on her husband's love, and she had fondly hoped that by means of this magnet John's heart might be drawn to hers, till all reserve was broken down, and she might enter into that Elysium which she had once pictured to herself in a husband's love.

As the child pined, John seemed harder than ever. His silence and reserve became intensified, and Edith saw that the grief he felt was another and distinct from her own.

To a mother under such circumstances the warm sympathy of her husband is everything. That alone can

make endurable the anguish of seeing the one loved object gradually passing away.

Several other attacks of blood-spitting had occurred since that alluded to in our last chapter, and Dr Noble had been forced to acknowledge that disease was devastating the delicate pulmonary tissues ; and John's professional eyes were able to read only too truly, in his son's waning strength, the inevitable end.

He was himself passing into middle life childless, and with apparently little hope of future offspring. He saw his wife an unhappy and disappointed woman, who, having lost the one thing that made it possible for her to forego the love and confidence, which were her right as a wife, would now in the course of nature become more and more discontented. He saw that the artificial life they had been leading would, in all probability, cause deeper division, and it was not unlikely a time might come when Edith's love would be his no longer.

True love, it is said, can never die, but none the less it is wise not to put so precious a jewel to too severe a test. As by the unceasing drop of the rivulet the solid rock is slowly but surely worn away, so may the loving heart, once so fervid and full of affection, as a consequence of neglect, gradually lose its former fire, and when once this is extinguished, it is a dead heart indeed !

Little John was a precocious child, and one of those sometimes seen, in whom, in spite of pronounced organic disease, the intellect has become prematurely sharpened and developed.

These little waifs of humanity are not the least wonderful phenomena in the problem of life ; and it is sad to see the little sparks of the great flame of human intelligence becoming fanned into a blaze, just as death is preparing to put his grim extinguisher upon them.

'Surely,' says the platonist, 'we see here evidence of

the spiritual entity of the soul apart from the body? What creator of divine order, who had any regard for the eternal fitness of things, would suffer such celestial fire to burn but for a few short years, and then go out into everlasting night? Surely the intellectual existence of that child is only postponed to a later period, when it may grow up free and unfettered by terrestrial impediments?'

Such ideas might have been congenial to Mr Paget, but would have been altogether scouted by John. What evidence had there ever been apart from Scripture that death was not final? What reason to believe that the soul did not die with the body, seeing that it was an integral part of the latter, and nothing more than—as he would put it—the subjective side of brain-life of which the brain cells were the objective?

When the child was born into the world, where was the soul? Did it not grow with the growing brain? Why, then, not perish with the same? So that he could take no consolation in the idea of a future existence in which he might again be with his son. His son's life was everything to him, and its cessation he regarded as everlasting division.

Sometimes of an evening the sick child sat up for a short time, or was propped up with pillows in his bed, and Edith read to him, while he listened attentively, now and then interrupting by a question, which often puzzled his mother to answer.

On one occasion after a pause in the reading he abruptly asked, 'Mother, is father a great doctor?'

'Yes, dear, he is a great doctor.'

'Has he cured many people?' repeated the child.

'Yes, Johnnie, a great many people.'

'Why doesn't he cure me, then?'

Edith burst into tears. 'My dear child, your father

would be only too glad to cure you, but God does not let him cure every one.'

'But why won't God let him?' said the little piping voice, 'if he cures other people, and he's my father too?'

So he prattled on, and at times John would be present himself, and try to amuse his son by showing him pictures, and bringing home toys of every description. But the wasted look, his breathlessness on a little excitement, and many other little things, which to his trained eyes spoke too clearly of the advancing disease, depressed him terribly, and drove him away from the bedside.

His son noticed it, and a certain amount of restraint was engendered between them, Johnnie not feeling so much at home with him as with his mother.

He sometimes asked his mother, when John left him on these occasions, why father was angry with him, and raised his large eyes so plaintively, and full of tears, saying 'he had been trying to be good.'

If Edith followed her husband after his flight from the sick-room, she would find him in his study, doing nothing except moodily gazing into the fire, with a look almost like despair on his face.

'Oh, John, why do you leave us so?' she would say, bursting into tears, 'it is so unkind to the child, he thinks you are offended, and it is so hard for me to see his poor little face pinched with distress which might be averted.'

'Edith,' John would reply almost sternly, 'I can't help it. I'm sorry it does pain him, but I should go mad if I were to watch the little fellow longer. I shall have to stay away all together, unless I leave him as I do.'

'But, John, is it not quite as painful for me?' cried his wife through her tears. 'How many hours do I

watch by his bedside, indeed I don't seem able to leave it?'

'Yes, dear, that is true enough, but I see things you cannot, and ideas come into my brain, which I am happy to think would not occur to you.'

'Do you think him so much worse?' said Edith, starting up. 'Oh, don't say that!'

'No, dear, I didn't say that. What does Noble think?'

'He has not been very encouraging lately,' was his wife's reply.

On another occasion John was present when a dose of medicine was being given to his son. The little fellow bravely took it, but from the expression on his face it seemed as if he would have done anything rather than do so.

Almost immediately afterwards he began to retch, and rejected the offending draught, but with such a look of pain, that John, turning to the nurse, ordered her not to give the patient any more of the medicine.

'But, John,' said his wife, 'that is the medicine Dr Noble has just ordered.'

'I can't help it,' he replied, 'I won't have the child tortured. What is the use of these experiments on his stomach? I can see they do no good.'

'Isn't he then,' said Edith, with a perplexed look, 'to have any medicine at all? I thought, John, you had confidence in Dr Noble?'

'Well, dear, and so I have. Ask him to see me this evening before he goes, if he visits the child.'

A little later Dr Noble and John were closeted together in the study. 'You will excuse me, Noble, won't you,' said the latter, 'for interfering with your treatment? But the medicine did so upset the child, and he dislikes

it so much. Besides, as you know, medicine is quite useless.'

'My dear Armstrong,' was the reply, 'that may be all very true, but if you take my advice you will give the child some kind of medicine. You may not believe in it, and perhaps, I may not expect much from it in such a case; but what a sad effect it is likely to have upon your wife, if you openly give up all hope, as you will seem to do, if you stop all medicine. It will also seem strange to the nurse, and to every one else, and you must admit, it is quite possible to give something that can't possibly do harm. Come, let us alter the prescription.'

So a compromise was effected, and little Johnnie had another medicine, which he did not make wry faces over, and which his stomach did not revolt against.

John was now one of the leading surgeons of the metropolis, and numbered many aristocratic patients on his list.

He was popular with the profession, and on the council of his college, and in the course of a year or two would in all probability be its president.

Yet in spite of all material prosperity he was far from happy. His home life was the most miserable part of his existence, and only in the hurry and turmoil of professional work did he seem to live.

One morning he read an announcement in the *Times* that the Rev. James Paget would preach a special sermon at St Philips, Mayfair, on Thursday evening, October 15th.

It was then Tuesday, but this notice seemed to haunt him all Wednesday and Thursday, and when the evening of the latter day came, he seemed to feel an irresistible impulse to go and hear his old friend preach once more.

A professional call delayed him when just about to

start, so that he was late for the service, and only arrived at the church just as Mr Paget was ascending the pulpit.

He gazed closely at the preacher, and noticed that although in a measure altered by being sallow and thinner, there was the same eloquent, earnest look in his eyes; and when his clear and incisive voice rang through the building, the old spell of his influence once again came over him.

‘And Nathan said unto David, “Thou art the man.” “The sword shall never depart from thine house.” “The child, also, that is born to thee shall surely die.”’

Mr Paget then eloquently dwelt on the inevitable consequences of sin and evil doing. ‘My brethren,’ said he, ‘as a divine punishment fell on the guilty Jewish king, so in like manner a Nemesis will surely follow our misdoings. It may be that no Nathan will come and point out our sins: punishment by the sword, too, is not the only punishment that can be meted out. The eye of God is everywhere. He knows the secrets of every heart, and vain would it be to suppose that He knows not our secret sins.’

‘When He created the world He ordained in the physical, as also in the moral and ethical universe, fixed and unalterable laws. As surely as the stone thrown upwards obedient to the law of gravity returns to the thrower, so likewise, in one way or another, will punishment, even in this world, find out the wrong-doer.’

‘Brethren, some of you here,’ and John thought the preacher’s eyes sought him out in particular, ‘perhaps, know this too well. I sympathise with such, and pray God that in His own good time He will remove the burden. In the meantime, like David, you must bear it, and as in his case—may it be the means of drawing

your hearts unto a true knowledge of your sins, and to sincere repentance.'

For more than half-an-hour Mr Paget kept the attention of the congregation riveted on him. Many were much affected, and John himself felt not a little stirred by the fervour of the preacher, who seemed to be speaking to his inmost soul.

When he thought of the past, he felt compelled to confess that a Nemesis in very truth had never left him since the Fritton tragedy. As he came out of the church he seemed to hear, with unnatural distinctness beating through his brain, the echo of the text, 'The child that is born to thee shall surely die.'

On entering his house he was surprised to see three of his servants together in the hall, talking to one another in frightened whispers.

On seeing him enter they hastily separated, and the footman approached and said, 'If you please, sir, will you go directly to mistress, Dr Noble is with her.'

There was a peculiar look on the man's face as he spoke, and intuitively John knew what had happened.

Almost in a dream, with face pallid and with heart scarce beating, he silently made his way to his son's bedroom. There by the bedside sat Edith, as if in a trance, with eyes fixed rigidly on the mortal remains of her son, and taking no notice of aught else. Every now and again she breathed with sighing respirations, clenched her hands, and shivered.

She was more than half unconscious, and Dr Noble, who was by her side and rather anxious, felt relieved to see John enter the room.

'Ah, Armstrong, it's all over,' he said sadly. 'I was sent for half-an-hour ago, and when I came I found the little one as you see. I'm afraid Mrs Armstrong is terribly upset.'

John shuddered. What a climax this to the warning he had just received ! What a ghastly dream the whole evening seemed !—the crowded church, the solemn denunciation of the preacher, and now the chamber of death ; his only son there, still and motionless, with the heart-broken mother by the side, and the nurse sympathetically bending over her.

Dr Noble's words, however, broke the spell, and in hollow accents he answered, 'Thank you, Noble, for your kind attention. This is a great shock for my wife, and'—after a pause—'for myself, though, of course, it is not unexpected. Good night,' he continued, as his friend rose to depart, 'I must do my best to comfort my wife.'

When Dr Noble had gone, John gazed for a minute or two on the little wasted form. Here then was the end of all his hopes for the future. What was the good now of success and prosperity, when he who he had fondly hoped would enjoy his wealth, and bear his name, had himself gone where riches and worldly honour avail nothing ?

With the greatest gentleness he tried to arouse Edith. She looked at him impassively, but said nothing. After an interval she burst into violent fits of sobbing ; and when these had a little subsided, he rang for her maid, and between them they got Edith away to her bedroom, and thence to bed.

John administered a composing draught, which was swallowed unresistingly, and after a time the poor mother found refuge from her grief in a fitful slumber.

Going to his study John saw lying on the table an envelope with a large official stamp. He opened it mechanically and read :—

'Dear Sir,—I have the honour to inform you that Her

Majesty has been graciously pleased to create you, by Letters Patent, a Baronet of the United Kingdom.

I am,—Yours truly,

BEDFROD.'

He smiled grimly as he crushed the letter contemptuously in his hand, and threw it to the ground.

A Baronet, forsooth! He a baronet, and his only son lying dead above! He sank into his chair, and, placing his elbows on the table, clasped his hands over his forehead.

How proud he could have been under other circumstances, and with what satisfaction he would have carried the news to Edith! But now, would he not insult the mother's grief with such a 'dead sea-apple' of consolation?

'How different it might have been,' he muttered.

Then came a fearful cloud of remorseful thoughts—a sort of waking nightmare, obscuring everything but the past, which was only too clear.

He felt again, as he had felt on that eventful afternoon at Driffild in his father's house, when he read in the *Times* the consequences of his sin, and the demon of remorse made him rush madly from the house, and walk mile after mile, till almost exhausted by physical fatigue.

On that occasion had he accidentally taken his way to Miller's Cliff his father's forebodings might have been not unwarranted. Now, as then, self control was loosened, and demon ideas seemed to take bodily shape, and urge him to all kinds of desperate deeds.

For nigh three hours he sat in a sort of a stupor in which he endured the most bitter mental anguish, and it seemed to him he could not continue to live on.

Might he not die, and end it all? He had never loved Edith, and now the child was dead, she was farther than

ever from him. With injustice as monstrous, as inconsistent, he seemed to associate her with what chiefly caused his distress, and to blame her for his treatment of Mary Elliot ; deluding himself with the idea that if it had not been for Edith he might never have driven that unfortunate one to self-destruction.

CHAPTER XV

CHARLEY GETS INTO DIFFICULTIES, AND SIR JOHN ARMSTRONG MAKES HIS WILL

‘I can no other answer make, but—Thanks—
And—Thanks—’

It was on the Saturday following that Mr Paget called on the Armstrongs.

He found the house in Cavendish Square in deep mourning, all the blinds being down. He wondered what had happened, and in a moment the thought of the child, and the recent report he had heard from Mrs Dawson as to the state of its health, flashed through his mind.

Did it mean that Edith's child was no longer living, and that what had been feared had come to pass? Should he make the proposed call, or should he defer it? He was bound to leave London on the next day, and it might be some time before he was again in town, and had he not promised Edith's mother to make a point of seeing her daughter on the first occasion he was in London?

After a little hesitation he gently knocked at the door. On the footman opening it, he asked if Mrs Armstrong were able to see visitors. He was an old friend, and had only lately returned from India.

The footman said, *Lady* Armstrong would not be able to see visitors, for her son had just died, and it had been a great shock. But he would take up his card. He then showed him into the library, and desired him to wait.

After a short interval the footman returned, and said 'her ladyship' would see him. As he entered the drawing-room, a lady rose to receive him dressed in deep mourning, and in a moment Mr Paget recognised Edith, and saw written on her face the marks of the terrible shock she had recently gone through.

She was thinner than he remembered her in the old time, there was a look of pain upon her face, and it was with difficulty she restrained her emotion.

For a moment he hesitated, and seemed scarcely to know how to address her. His look of warm sympathy, however, had a magnetic influence over Edith, and made her forget her trouble for the time.

'Oh, Mr Paget, I am so glad to see you,' she exclaimed, 'but I am in such distress. My only child is lying dead upstairs. What shall I do, what shall I do?' and she burst into tears.

Mr Paget came nearer, and, taking one of her hands, said, 'Dear Lady Armstrong, it must indeed have been a blow. I cannot tell you how I sympathise with you. I heard from your mother that the child was very sickly and delicate, but I did not think it was so bad. Do try and bear this bravely,' he continued, as her sobbing became intensified, 'it is one of the troubles we must all go through. Many a mother at the present time is bemoaning her loss, as you are yours, and is suffering the same distress. It is a little comfort to know we have fellow-sufferers, and that God is not putting it all on us. Then, your husband—he must feel it as intensely as you. You must consider him.'

'John feel it as much as I? No, no!' vehemently exclaimed Edith. 'He is doing his work as usual, and is only too glad to get away from the house. But I don't know how he feels! He never lets me know what he feels. We do not share our troubles, Mr Paget,' she added calmly, but with such a note of sadness that the latter did not want further confirmation of what he feared—that there was no true sympathy between them, as far as the inner life was concerned.

'It is a terrible blow,' he answered after a pause, 'and only time can alleviate the bitterness. My dear madam, try to do something to distract your thoughts from this great calamity. Although it may seem hard, I think your husband is right to go about his work as usual.'

'But what *can* I do, Mr Paget? I have no profession to occupy me. All the time I had to spare from social duties was given to my son, and now he is gone'—again the tears came to her eyes.

'Yet, there is work in the world,' softly replied the clergyman. 'Soothe the troubles of others, so shall your own burden become lighter. Believe me, there are terrible troubles, terrible suffering eating out the hearts of many of our brethren! Be a labourer in this field, if you have time to spare from your immediate duties, where the promise is so great, and the workers so few! It is in this way that you will best find relief.'

Edith ceased weeping, and looking up into the other's face, said :—

'Thank you, Mr Paget, it is a great comfort to talk with you. How I wish you lived nearer!'

James Paget's heart again beat quickly, and he felt the blood surging in his cheeks. To be so addressed by Edith! He did indeed wish his cure were nearer London. But if so, would the constant presence of his beloved

make life easier, especially when she was possessed by another who so lightly regarded her ?

Somewhat hesitatingly he replied, 'Yes, that would be nice, but still I hope I shall see you occasionally. I am not far from Norwich, and you will be visiting the old folks.'

'Yes, Mr Paget,' said Edith, starting up, 'that's what I must do. I will go back to Norwich, and stay with mother for a time. I know John won't go, and I shall be by myself, but I am as much alone here, except for visitors. 'Yes, I'll go to Norwich; perhaps the associations connected with the old place will help to blot out the troubles of the last year. I will write home, and if you see my mother, Mr Paget, you can tell her so.'

Mr Paget was about to take his departure, and was bidding adieu to Edith, when John entered.

'What, Paget? Back again once more?' he exclaimed. 'Very pleased to see you. You haven't altered much, and your constitution has borne the strain of a tropical climate better than I thought it would. I hear you are the rector of Fritton, and I congratulate both you and your parishioners. You are certainly a change after the late rector.'

'Thank you, Sir John, for your kind words, but I am deeply grieved at your recent bereavement.'

'Yes, yes,' said the surgeon hastily, 'we have been having a sad time.' Then turning to his wife he added, 'I have an appointment, dear, to see Lord Glenburn with Hobson at 3.30, and it only wants ten minutes to that time' (looking at his watch). 'When can you dine with us, Paget?'

'I am afraid I must postpone that pleasure for the present,' said the latter. 'As I have just told your wife, I am leaving town at once.'

'Well, Paget, don't forget us next time you're in London. Goodbye, I must be off, though I should like to have a chat about old times.'

The fashionable doctor was gone, and Mr Paget, even in the short interview, could not help remarking an absence of sympathy with his wife's only too evident prostration.

The courtesy, too, he showed her, was of a formal and artificial character, and seemed wanting in reality.

He thought how different would have been his conduct under such circumstances. His wife should not mourn alone! He would at least share the burden with her.

'Your husband is a busy man,' he said to Edith, as the door closed behind the baronet. 'I'm afraid you don't see much of him.'

'I never see him,' was the reply with some warmth. 'He is always busy. I used to think it was for our son's sake he worked so hard, but now what is the good of it all? I used to be much happier in the country in old Dr Armstrong's time than with all our grandeur here. Perhaps, if we had stayed there our boy would not have been taken.'

'Don't think that,' replied the clergyman. 'Providence directs our lives whether in town or country, and it was God's will this should happen.'

Why?
'How kind he is,' she said to herself, when Mr Paget had gone, and she found herself alone. 'I really feel all the better for having spoken with him. I should like to see mother again and the old house. John won't care whether I stay here or go to Norwich, he takes no interest in what I do. Perhaps, if I go away for a time he will miss me a little, and when I return I shall be more welcome.'

She sighed, for she still loved her husband, but this

neglect of his cut her to the heart, and she was beginning to notice more and more his increasing apathy, and might before long begin to question whether he really loved her.

All the way back to Fritton the image of Edith haunted the Rev. James Paget. When he reached the rectory, and took the wonted chair in his study, he mused over the past, and thought of the future.

What a different place the rectory would be with a wife like Edith. What a pity she married John. He felt sure John did not love—nay, had never loved her. Edith's mother had guessed only too surely the truth, and maternal solicitude had strengthened the failing faculties of age.

John readily consented to his wife's proposed visit.

'I think, dear,' he said, 'a change will do you good. You must remember me to the old folks.'

His wife looked disappointed. 'Won't you try to come down for a day or two occasionally?' she asked.

'I'm afraid it can't be managed just now, but noting the look of pain, he added, 'I will try, however, perhaps it might be done.'

John said this without seriously intending it. He did not mean to go to Norwich, if he could help it. That town was too much connected with a certain chapter in his past to make the idea of a visit palatable. His visits to Norwich since his marriage had been few and far between.

His wife, however, knew not his thoughts, and rejoined, 'Mother would be so pleased to see you. She has often wondered why you never accompany me.'

A few days later John was told his brother-in-law wanted to see him. On entering his consulting-room he was surprised at the worried expression only too apparent on Charley's face.

‘Why, man,’ he said, ‘what on earth is the matter? Nothing wrong with the wife or young ones?’

‘No,’ replied the other, ‘they’re all right, but—’ here he hesitated,—‘something has happened, and I am at my wit’s end to know what to do. I thought I should like to talk the matter over with you, though I don’t know that you can help me.’

John saw something serious had occurred, and sat down facing his brother-in-law, waiting patiently for his story.

‘You see,’ said Charley, ‘we solicitors in the course of our business are often called upon to occupy the position of trustees. As a rule we are quite able to protect ourselves, but it sometimes happens that in spite of the utmost caution we are let in.

‘For some years now, I have been one of the trustees of the late Sir John Caithwood’s estate, and have for long known Dick Caithwood, the testator’s brother, who has lately become an articled clerk in my office. Owing to certain contingencies it became necessary to raise money by the sale of a portion of the estate, and accordingly it was arranged to sell part—the Shipton Manor part—for £10,000.

‘After the conveyance had been duly made I should have gone to Liverpool to receive the money on handing over the deed at the office of the purchaser’s solicitor; but on that day I was terribly busy, and I had a short time before arranged with Dick that he should go in my place, if I were pressed. I always considered Dick a shrewd man of business and quite competent to see after a matter of this kind, and I never dreamt he was a rogue.

‘Well, he went to Liverpool, and the money, as luck would have it, was paid in notes, the purchaser being an eccentric party, who has always distrusted our modern

system of banking. I have reason to believe that Dick knew something of his weakness, and went prepared to perpetrate the fraud, which he after carried out: for, on receiving the notes he disappeared, and has doubtless taken passage for the States under an assumed name, in one of the numerous packets that sail from that port.

'I find that six sailed within the three days following the receipt of the money, but I have not as yet traced him to any. I suspected nothing, and was so blinded by my confidence in the man, that I only found out the fraud on looking over the banking book the next day, and finding to my surprise this sum had not been paid in.

'I at once wired to Caithwood and the solicitors at Liverpool, and then discovered what had happened. So you see, John, I am responsible for that £10,000, and must find it somehow—or I am a ruined man.' Charley looked gloomily on the floor. 'To tell the truth,' he continued, 'I don't see where it is to come from.'

John was silent for a minute, then said cheerfully:—

'Never mind, Charley, don't let this upset you. I'll see you through the business.'

'What, you, John?' gasped the other, '£10,000!' and he stared almost incredulously at his friend.

'Why not?' said the latter, calmly. 'I have not been idle, Charley, during the last few years, and I don't work for nothing—to speak plainly, old fellow, I can spare the money, and then again'—here a shadow came over his face—'what is the good of money to me now? There was one to come after, and this title to be provided for, but all that is at an end. The money must come to you and Alice by-and-bye, and your children.'

Charley's eyes sparkled with gratitude, but he was much affected by his friend's allusion to his recent loss.

'Ah, John,' he said, 'you have had your troubles. I

wish you had stayed at Driffield. Perhaps the country air would have been better for your son.'

'Charley, if I had not come to London, I should not have been able to help you now! Seeing his brother-in-law was pained by his remark, he added, 'but who knows? Plenty of children die in the country. It's a case of the chapter of accidents:—

"Mere puppets we that come and go
At the bidding of vast, formless things,
That shift the scenery to and fro—"

'But this is not a gay subject, old man. By the way, there was one thing I was going to speak to you about, and I may as well do so now. I want you to draw up my will. I think you lawyers always preach that every man should make his will, however young he is, and here am I close upon forty, and have not done so yet.'

'If you like, John, you can give me your instructions now,' said Charley. 'How do you wish your estate to be settled?'

'I have no relations except my sister,' was the reply. 'Of course, Edith must have a life interest, but subject to that, with the exception of a few trifling legacies, I wish the whole to be equally divided between your children.'

'But how about Edith?' inquired the other. 'Supposing anything were to happen to you and she were to marry again, should she still keep her life interest?'

John hesitated. 'What is usual, Charley?'

'It is thought, a large jointure may tempt adventurers to look after a widow for the sake of her money, and many testators add a clause cancelling the life interest on re-marriage.'

'That is hard on the widow,' said John. 'If I am dead, and have no children, why should my widow not

marry again? and if she does, why should she go penniless to her second husband? No, Charley, never mind that clause.'

'Anything else?'

John replied in the negative.

'Well,' said Charley, 'I'll soon have the document drawn up, and I can't tell you how grateful I am! You have saved myself, Alice, and the children from worse than ruin. I don't know how I can ever thank you.'

'Don't try,' said the other, 'and I must particularly ask you not to mention this to any one. I don't want to pose as a benefactor, Charley. Again, there is no reason why the world should not think you quite able to meet the loss.'

'I must tell Alice.'

'Very well, then don't tell any one else.'

With a hearty shake of John's hand Charley hurried away, indued with new life, and the former felt a greater satisfaction than he had experienced for many a day on seeing the joy and happiness that he had brought to his despairing friend.

On reaching home Charley at once sought his wife.

'Alice,' he said abruptly, 'John has proved our good genius. He has saved us. How successful he must have been! He spoke of letting us have £10,000, as if it were a light matter.'

He then told her of the conversation with her brother.

'Poor John,' sighed Alice, 'how gloomy he seems! With all his prosperity he cannot be happy. And Edith, she burst out crying when I asked her if John were going to accompany her to Norwich, and exclaimed irritably, "Does he ever accompany me?" I once thought it would be so different if John married Edith.'

'The loss of the little one has made a difference,' replied

her husband. After a pause he continued, 'John has also asked me to prepare his will, and all is to go to our children after a life interest to Edith.'

'John wants to make his will,' repeated the other in astonishment. 'Why, Charley? He is not ill, is he? Why should he suddenly think of this?'

'Every one ought to make his will, whether he is ill or not, dear. John is only doing what every reasonable man ought to do.'

'Still, there's something strange about it,' said his wife.

John's will was in due time prepared, signed, sealed, and witnessed. By it, in event of his predeceasing his wife, the latter was to have the income derived from his property during her life; but in event of her marrying again, half of the property was at once to go to Charley's children; she was to continue to enjoy the rest during her life, and at her death this also was to revert to Charley's family.

'If anything were to happen to me would Edith marry again?' mused John, the evening after signing the will. 'Why shouldn't she, if she cared for any one else? She loved me well once, and true love is said to be for ever, but who knows! I'm afraid I've not turned out quite the husband she pictured. Ah, how different things might have been!'

He had had a busy day, and had slept little the night before, and in the midst of this train of ideas he dozed.

The hour was late, so it happened that Edith came to look for him. She found him lying back in his chair in a terribly uneasy sleep.

She was quite frightened as she watched his face. Big drops of sweat rolled down his forehead, his features moved spasmodically, and he seemed to be wrestling with some appalling nightmare.

'John,' she cried, 'it's time you went to bed, you had

no rest last night. Don't sleep like that in your chair, it can't do you good ! What is the matter ?'

She tried to raise his arm. John moved uneasily, and opened his eyes, but there seemed a strange light there : he did not recognise his wife, only muttered in low, heart-broken tones, 'Is there no forgiveness, Mary ? What more can I do ?'

His wife's heightened tones at length thoroughly aroused him, and from the look on her face he saw he must have greatly alarmed her.

'What do you mean ?' she said excitedly. 'Why do you always mention that name ?'

'I really don't know, dear, I suppose I was dreaming,'—he shuddered—'one can't be responsible for what one says in dreams.'

Edith, however, was not satisfied, and episodes like this did not tend to close the growing estrangement. She still loved her husband, but she fancied he was ill, and she continued to puzzle over these attacks. While John's mental unrest became aggravated, by the fear that in his sleep he said more than was actually the case. He thus became afraid to sleep, on account of a dread that through remorse, he might unwittingly divulge the past in his sleep to his hitherto unsuspecting wife.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT JOHN FOUND IN HIS FATHER'S DESK

'Of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate ;
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute.'

A FEW weeks later, Edith went to Norwich, and there spent Christmas with her parents ; while John stayed in London, and continued the daily routine of his professional duties.

His celebrity was such that time did not hang heavily on his hands, his services being required on every side.

In the case of all who reach the top of the tree in their profession, the call on them is invariably more than they can respond to ; so Sir John Armstrong found that he could not do nearly all the work that offered.

But he endeavoured to get through as much as possible, because he found that active occupation was his greatest refuge from the morbid fancies that seemed to take possession of him more and more.

Little work, however, could be done in the evening, and he had for some time lost all interest in attending the meetings of those societies he once delighted in. All social festivities were distasteful, so he found the evening and night by far the greatest trial. The absence of his wife did not make matters better.

For if he were free from one source of fear, that she might look more closely into his mind than he liked, the relief was more than neutralised by the absolute monotony of his existence ; for he practically held intercourse with no one, except during his professional rounds.

It is true his brother-in-law occasionally called, and Alice ; but the former was a busy man, and often had to work in the evening ; and what time he had to spare was taken up in his own family life. But he looked curiously at John, for his sharp eyes were beginning to notice that a change he had remarked for some time was getting more marked.

What was the meaning of this increasing apathy and listlessness ? It could not be healthy. Did not the doctor himself require a doctor ?

He more than once told John he ought to consult a *confrère*—that he was quite sure he was not well.

‘Why don’t you go to Norwich ?’ he said. ‘It would be a rest.’

John sighed—he did not want a rest. What would become of him if he had not his work to fall back upon ?

‘Then, again, my dear fellow,’ Charley continued, ‘you ought to go. The mater is very ailing—she can’t be here long. I’m sure she wonders why you haven’t been to see her.’

‘Yes, Charley,’ he replied, ‘I will run down. You’re right, I have not treated your mother quite as I should, but you know how difficult it is for me to get away.’

About this time John became aware of a curious symptom, which he had not noticed hitherto. Something had happened to his sight ; his vision was misty in the evening, and it became difficult to do literary work. His eyes were always watering, flashes of light shot before them, and he was liable to unaccountable fits of giddiness.

He remembered Charley's words, and decided to speak to a friend, a noted eye specialist.

Dr Goodman listened to John's account of his symptoms, and made a careful examination of his eyes. With some hesitation he said, 'Things are not quite right, Armstrong; you have certainly had retinitis.' He then carefully tested the extent and accuracy of the field of vision, which proved to be satisfactory; so in reassuring tones he continued, 'Your sight, however, does not seem practically much the worse. You say it's only at night you are troubled. You mustn't do night work. Rest your eyes.'

John explained that he had been doing less work than usual in the evening lately, but the symptoms had not improved.

'Have you any great mental worry?' he suddenly asked, looking fixedly at John.

The latter started. The sudden delineation of disease he had not dreamt of had given him a shock, and the vista of probable consequences darted through his mind, and seemed to paralyse him for the moment.

'No—no—' he abruptly answered, and he tried to force a smile, but the attempt was not successful. Then in a voice which had a perceptible tremor, he said, 'Do you think I have Bright's disease?'

'It looks a little like it, Armstrong, and you certainly ought to have rest and quiet—mental rest especially.'

Thanking Dr Goodman, John drove away with another care added to his already overburdened mind. For where is that son of Adam, whose mind is so strong, whose nervous constitution is so firm, as not to pale at the first intimation of organic disease, when he thus has his mortality so palpably brought before him.

To a medical man such an announcement is doubly

harassing ; for he is able to map out only too clearly the future ravages of the disease. The greater his knowledge, the more profound his experience, the more will he have cause for future unrest.

This is why so many medical men refuse to consult about their own symptoms, shrinking from a foreknowledge of disease, for fear it may be irremediable.

On making further investigation, John found there was reason to believe Dr Goodman was right, and his mind was not made easier by picturing the usual course of events in chronic Bright's disease. 'My life shall never wane away in that manner,' he said to himself with grim determination.

But other ideas seemed to be evoked whereat he shuddered, and tried to change his thoughts, and banish a spectre which beckoned him along a path, the end of which he could but faintly see, and which ever, as it faded, threatened a re-appearance.

His appetite began to flag, and occasionally he fell back upon stimulants, to fortify himself against the feelings of weakness, that at these times oppressed him.

Yet his constitution was such, that however feeble and nervous he might seem, when the slightest noise startled him, and shadows had terror for him, if he were called upon to operate, he became at once the great surgeon. His hand never shook when he grasped the knife, his mind then at least was free and concentrated on the work in hand, which invariably was brilliantly and successfully performed to the admiration of onlookers.

It was for this reason he so eagerly sought after work, as it was only then he really enjoyed mental peace.

Now Edith was away, the house in Cavendish Square was lonely indeed. After dinner he occasionally strolled out for half-an-hour, and sometimes made a short call

in the neighbourhood. But of late years he had not been very sociable, so that those he visited were rather acquaintances than friends.

One evening he was sitting in his study unable to read or write, a prey to the usual morbid ideas, and by way of distracting his thoughts, he began to turn out the contents of an old desk, that had belonged to his father.

He remembered that at his father's death he had looked over its contents for business purposes, and had put on one side everything that had no reference to the administration of his effects. Now, he thought he would glance over the miscellaneous assortment he had then neglected.

He first drew out several letters, written by himself to his father more than twenty years before. As he read them over, and noted the youthful enthusiasm and happiness so apparent, he could not help contrasting his then mental state with the present.

Then all was promising and rose coloured: life was indeed a tempting panorama of everything that was pleasant. Now he could scarcely believe he had ever written such letters, and still less, that he could ever have felt as the writer seemed to have felt. He tossed them on one side, and turned over other papers. There were letters written before he was born, by his father to his grandfather, and by other departed Armstrongs more than a century ago, the context of which he could not understand.

One letter, however, he paused over, it was so strange, and he wondered what kind of man its writer was. From the signature he must have been an Armstrong, —one of his own kin.

It was dated from Weatherby in the county of York, a town about five miles from his native place, and addressed to a Dr Armstrong. It ran as follows:—

'Dear Jack,—I have again felt that terrible mental depression! I don't know what I shall do. An impulse at these times seems always prompting me to some dreadful crime.

If anything upsets me, and you know I am a little given to outbursts of passion, I lose all control over myself.

What will be the end of it? Is there any cure?
Yours, in great trouble, 'R. ARMSTRONG.'

June 14th, 1740.

Why, this must have been his great-great-uncle Robert.

It was verily a voice from the grave: the blood of the writer of this letter flowed in his veins! Had the insidious disease of his uncle found fresh life in him?

'I have heard my father say,' he mused, 'that uncle Robert suffered from some disease of his mind. He met his death by falling over a cliff,—that was the verdict of the coroner's jury—though there seems to have been more than a suspicion of suicide. I wonder what was the date of his death?'

He got down the old family Bible, and turning to the register read, 'Robert Armstrong,—Died Aug. 14th, 1740, age 45.'

So he must have met his end exactly two months after writing this letter.

It was more than singular! It would seem that if he really did commit suicide, he took pains to conceal it.

Was it suicide or accident? The letter was some evidence of the former.

Strange ideas began to crowd into his brain. He seemed to be himself contemplating such an end, and to be considering whether it could not be so managed that all the world might be in the dark, and imagine he had had no hand in it.

'I must not disgrace my friends,' he thought. 'But

how much better this than going through lingering disease, all the horror of increasing dropsy, breathlessness and failing brain.

'Edith would be better without me. She might miss me at first, but every year there is the chance of her finding out the worst, and then I couldn't face her.

'What *will* be the end of it?' he wondered. 'Can I have inherited Uncle Robert's mind? I am beginning to feel impulses which I can't control, but they seem dictated by reason overwhelmingly strong.'

Replacing all the papers in the desk, he went to bed, and fell into a troubled sleep.

Meanwhile Edith was in Norwich, watching the declining health of her mother. The old lady was turned sixty, and had always been an invalid: now it was certain the sands of her life were fast running out.

Edith nursed her tenderly, and spent many hours by her bedside. At times the dying woman would speak of John, and ask her daughter painful questions as to their relations.

She sometimes asked querulously whether her husband could not spare time from his grand patients to come and see her.

'Oh, mother,' she said, 'I have just written to him, I feel sure he will be here shortly.'

But John did not come. He received his wife's letters, and went on procrastinating, and more than once Edith's mother expressed surprise at his behaviour in the presence of her father, and Mr Paget, who chanced to be by at the time.

And now a curious circumstance happened at Fritton.

Old Joe lay on his death-bed, and became troubled in his mind, as to the part he had played in the past, in keeping back the letter he had found by the body of the unfortunate Mary Elliot.

He had been greatly impressed by Mr Paget, and had once or twice spoken to that gentleman in a guarded manner, but had received little encouragement.

James Paget had suspected that John had been more implicated in the matter than was imagined, but to what extent he did not know, and he had always devoutly prayed that he never might.

It was with some consternation, therefore, he heard one evening that a messenger had come to the rectory requesting his immediate presence.

The lad who brought the message expressed an opinion, 'that the old un was a-dyin' fast.'

When the Rev. James Paget stood by the bedside of Joe, he saw the old man was sinking. He was told the doctor had given no hope, and seeing from the look in Joe's eyes that he evidently wished to say something privately to him, he motioned to the others to leave them alone together.

When all had gone save the rector, Joe said in faltering accents, 'Parson, if a mon promised to kep a bad secret, ought un to tell it before un goes to the church-yard?'

'Have you done anything wrong, Joe,' asked the clergyman, 'that you wish to confess, before you die, to relieve your mind?'

'Na, na ; I done nought, but I know un as did, and I can't forget Farmer Elliot's poor drowned lamb—and, parson,' whispered hoarsely the dying man, 'ought na' Farmer Elliot to know what I know?'

'Would Farmer Elliot be any better for knowing what you know, Joe? Will you cause injury to any one by keeping your secret?'

'Na, na ; maybe na,' muttered Joe.

'Well, Joe,' continued the clergyman, 'it is not our place to judge others. They will have to answer some

day for themselves ! Do not trouble your mind about this, my poor fellow. It is no sin under such circumstances to keep your word—praiseworthy, rather ! But away with these earthly thoughts, Joe ! Think of our Saviour, who died for you and all of us !' and the rector knelt at the bedside, and prayed that the poor labour-worn toiler, who for fifty years had worked honestly for his bread, winter and summer, in the same fields in which his father had worked before him, humbly trying to do his duty in his own sphere of life, might now have peace.

The old man showed by his clasped hands and wrapt attention that he was fully conscious of the clergyman's devotion. Then the Rev. James Paget administered the Sacrament.

A little later Joe became unconscious, but there was a smile on his weather-beaten face, and his wanderings seemed to refer to memories of the long ago, to happy passages in his past life, and Mr Paget seemed to have exorcised the shadow that had been weighing upon his mind.

As he left the chamber of death he met the doctor, and the latter said, 'Ah, rector, I suppose it's all over ?'

'Yes, Dr Benson, Joe is at peace.'

Dr Benson was Dr Ling's successor, the latter having retired a short time before and sold his practice to Dr Benson, whom we have met once or twice before in these pages.

'I thought,' said the doctor, 'the old man would hardly go through the day.'

'By-the-bye,' asked the clergyman, as the other was taking his departure, 'How are they at the Manor ?' 'I heard you had been called in to Sir James Scrope.'

'No,' replied Dr Benson, 'my patient is Sir James Scrope's son. The young man has got some abdominal trouble, and the case is a little obscure. I wanted to call

in Sir John Armstrong, but Sir James seems to hesitate ; he has some idea Armstrong is too prone to operate, for he referred to that libel action. The litigation must have done Armstrong a lot of harm, but I suppose he's too firmly placed to care much about it.

Sir John Armstrong, moreover, is not a stranger at Fritton Manor, for he attended the baronet himself some seven years ago.'

'How could that be ?' asked the other. 'When has Sir John Armstrong lived at Fritton ?'

'He was *locum tenens* for old Ling, at a time when the baronet had a bad knee.'

Mr Paget started. So then he *did* see Armstrong that evening more than seven years ago in the train bound for Fritton.

'I know this as a fact,' continued Dr Benson, 'for I succeeded Armstrong as *locum*.'

They had been walking together during the conversation, but as the rectory was now reached, Mr Paget said 'Good-night' to his companion.

That evening as he sat alone in his study, he could not help thinking again of the incidents of the day.

It was now clear John had been residing at Fritton some three months before Mary Elliot came to her death. Did her sister Emily know this ? Was Sir John Armstrong the guilty one ?

Had he given Joe any encouragement the matter might have been made plain enough. But he did not regret the course he had taken, his conscience approved it, and he felt that he had done right.

CHAPTER XVII

ESTRANGEMENT BETWEEN MAN AND WIFE

‘It is the little rift within the lute,
That by-and-bye will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all.’

‘CAN you come at once? Mother is dying!’

This was the telegram John received one morning as he was sitting at breakfast in Cavendish Square.

Rising from the table he quickly indited a reply, promising to be at Norwich by an early train, and then, as the servant left the room with it, began to reflect on his various engagements, how they might be best disposed of, or postponed.

‘I shall probably be unable to return to-night,’ he mused. ‘I have been a little remiss, and if anything happens—which is not unlikely—it will be necessary to remain with the doctor for a few days.’

At 11 A.M. John was in the Great Eastern express hurrying to Norwich. As he watched the telegraph posts flitting by, he thought of the many times before he had made this journey, and how times had changed in the interval.

His own father was dead; his wife's mother was dying, and there only remained Dr Dawson now as a link to connect him with his early years.

His present journey seemed specially to recall his father's memory and the old life at Driffield.

What if he had been able to settle down there, as his father had done before him, and had made the family place his home, instead of following his ambition to London ?

In spite of his brilliant career might not his life have been happier ? Edith would have much preferred it, and there, he and his wife might have come together better, and this growing estrangement might never have been. His son, too, might he not have been living ?

His surgical talent would not have had the same fruitful field, and to that extent humanity had profited by his choice ; but personally he was not happier ; and could there be any doubt that his father's life had been far happier than his own ?

It was true old Dr Armstrong's life had not been very exciting, and somewhat of a humdrum character. He had lived from boyhood to manhood, day by day, year by year, in the same locality ; seeing the same sights, doing the same work, and mixing with the same friends and acquaintances. By integrity and manliness he had made for himself an indelible impression on the minds of his neighbours, so that when he died, each felt as if something had been taken out of his life, which could never be replaced.

It might also be true, there was not much in all this, it was mediocrity pure and simple. Yet a mediocrity of this kind has been treasured by many worthy men, who have wished for nothing more than—

‘ To fill their grave in quiet
And die upon the bed their fathers died.’

Had such a career always been impossible for him ?

It was true his inclination had always been against it,

but who has not had in his youth, ideas which, though strong and spirit stirring then, have vanished like mists before the sun of perfect manhood?

As he scanned his past, he saw clearly that one thing alone had made such a career impossible. That one sin, the burden of which had been so great, and the weight of which, instead of becoming lighter by time, had never ceased to grow heavier.

‘Others,’ he mused, ‘have been as bad as myself, and they have not been so cursed; the parsons prate about forgiveness, even when atonement is impossible. Is no remedy open to me? Have I committed the one unpardonable sin for which there is no forgiveness?’

He sighed as he realised the utter misery that had come over his being.

Indeed, the mental state that his reflections indicated, was pitiable in the extreme. He was in the prime of life, and the most successful surgeon of the day; his reputation was world-wide, and he was honoured everywhere. He had a loving wife, and, in fact, possessed nearly everything that in the eyes of the world is considered to make up happiness, yet he was unspeakably miserable.

He felt no enjoyment in life, was haunted unceasingly by morbid fancies, and only valued his work, because he seemed able to find in it a refuge from heart-racking reflections.

Sometimes it seemed to him almost as if he were like Mephistopheles, and that he could say, like the latter:—

‘Where we are is hell,
And where hell is, there must we ever be.’

It was quite true others had sinned as deeply and experienced no such retribution, but seemed happy in

spite of their misdeeds. But they were not 'John Armstrongs.'

The cunning Artificer that formed the protoplasm out of which they developed, had otherwise moulded the primordial cells, and the consequent intellectual results were widely different.

Let the wretched victim of cancer ask why he has been chosen to be the prey of that disease, when so many others escape. Or the sufferer from hydrophobia inquire, by what fortuitous arrangement of circumstances it happened, that the mad dog bit him out of all the other people in the busy thoroughfare.

Such problems must always remain insolvable, and poor humanity will seek in vain to answer such questions.

At Norwich John at once hastened to Dr Dawson's house. There he found the whole family (for Charley and his wife had been here for several days), and learnt that the end was fast approaching.

Mrs Dawson had expressed a wish that Mr Paget should administer to her the last Sacrament, and this ceremony was just taking place as John entered the room.

It was a solemn scene. The dying woman raised her eyes on his entrance, and there was a mild look of reproof on her pain-worn features.

By the bedside knelt Dr Dawson, grasping the hand of the dear life-companion so soon to leave him. But although he was fully conscious of the coming bereavement, his grief was tempered by the thought that the parting would be but brief.

Charley and Alice knelt on the other side of the bed, the latter breaking out every now and then into sobs.

By her father's side knelt Edith, almost unconscious through grief, and over her bowed head Mr Paget was reverentially performing his office :—

'The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.'

John instinctively knelt by his wife, and felt the profound influence that the Rev. James Paget never failed to excite, when engaged in his sacred ministry.

It was a wonderful gift, but there was nothing supernatural about it, his bearing being simply that of man officiating for man, as advocate before the Eternal Judge. The essence of this power is the thorough earnestness and belief of the man, who is thus able to instil into his fellow-men some of that confidence so palpable to himself.

At the conclusion of the service there was a hush, broken only occasionally by the sobs of the women, and a little later, Mrs Dawson slept the sleep everlasting.

The following day, the family were gathered together in the drawing-room. There was a sense of loss in their midst, a feeling of something taken away, which has left a void incapable of being filled.

These little gaps in the hedge of our social life, how eloquently they preach! What sermons could so vividly teach us what we are, and whither we go!

Edith and John were both present, and the former felt an estrangement from her husband she had never felt before.

It could not be otherwise with her mother lying dead in the house—that mother, whom she believed to have been so unkindly treated by John, who had abstained from coming to Norwich till the very last.

How unfeeling he had been! Professional business could not—indeed, it never ought to have been permitted to have kept him away. Would he have neglected his own mother as he had hers?

John noticed his wife's coldness, and partly divined the cause. But he felt certain Edith could not but

draw erroneous conclusions as to the cause of his apparent neglect ; for she could not know the nature of the antipathy which kept him away from the scene of the tragedy of his youth.

The knowledge he was now close to the spot, and in the same town, where he had first made the acquaintance of the ill-fated Mary Elliot, cast a still deeper gloom upon him. He scarcely slept at all, and every one began to notice his altered appearance.

While they were sitting together speaking in subdued tones, under the influence of the recent sad event, there was a knock at the door, and Mr Paget was announced.

This gentleman had not been expected, and a little surprise fell on the party, and wonder as to the cause of the visit.

After a sympathetic greeting to the mourners, Mr Paget came at once to the object of his visit. Going up to John he said, 'I have come on urgent business, and much as it grieves me at the present time to trouble you, the circumstances are such that I thought it my duty to do the best I could for a parishioner, who is in terrible distress at the present time. His only son is lying at death's door, and he thinks that you are the only one who can save him. God has just taken a dear one away, and you know the anguish of heart brought about by such a loss. You may through His mercy be the means of preventing a poor woman's heart from breaking under a similar affliction !'

'What do you mean, Paget? What can I do?' replied John in astonishment, rousing himself out of the gloom into which he had fallen, some of his old professional fire rekindling in him.

All the others likewise looked with astonishment at the clergyman.

'Sir James Scrope's only son,' continued the latter,

'is in a critical condition, and Dr Benson, who is in attendance, thinks the only hope is in an operation—Laparotomy, I think he calls it. He has also told Sir James that you are the only man who would be likely to do it successfully.

'You can imagine the father's state; he was going to rush up to town himself, to implore you to come at once. I informed him of what had just happened, and of your presence here, and he said almost in despair that he supposed his poor boy would have to die. But I pacified him by saying I would run over to Norwich, and let you know the details of the case.'

'You say a Dr Benson is in charge?' replied John. 'Do I know him? I don't seem to remember meeting him before.'

'Dr Benson,' said the clergyman, 'is Dr Ling's successor.'

John did know him, but for the moment he seemed an absolute stranger, so, shaking his head as if to negative an acquaintance, he looked at his watch and said:—

'When is the next train to Fritton?'

'There is one in half-an-hour.'

'Well, Paget, you had better return by it, and tell Dr Benson I will be with him prepared to operate by four this afternoon. It is now just one, and I will wire for my instruments to be sent down by the two o'clock express, so that everything ought to be ready by then. By-the-bye, Dr Benson might send for me to Fritton station. What train would get there between three and four?'

'There is one,' replied Mr Paget, 'at a quarter past three which would suit.'

'Very well,' let Dr Benson have this train met. I will come by it, and bring an assistant with me. Good-bye for the present.'

With these words John got up, and left the room to make his way to the telegraph office.

The misfortunes of others do help us to bear our own better ; and after John had gone, the rest found their minds a little drawn away from their own sorrow, by contemplating the cloud overhanging another hitherto happy household.

'Oh, how I feel for the poor mother,' said Edith with tears in her eyes !

'John may be able to do something,' said Dr Dawson, turning to the clergyman. 'Your doctor, Paget, is not far wrong in his estimate. Whatever surgeon can do, John can do, so we will not consider the case hopeless till he has tried and failed.'

'What promptness,' murmured Mr Paget admiringly, 'I never dreamt of such despatch. Won't Sir James be joyful.'

'Ah,' interpolated Charley, 'he hasn't much time to lose, has he, father, if he is to do anything ?'

Dr Dawson shook his head. 'That,' he replied, 'is one of the reasons of John's great professional success. Promptness in emergencies, a power of grasping mentally the right course, and of following it at once without delay or hesitation.

'In surgery it frequently happens that he who hesitates is lost, and there can be no doubt this promptness has been the means of snatching not a few patients from a certain grave.'

Edith sighed. 'Yes, John could show alacrity enough ; yet when her own mother was dying, and she had written letter after letter, what unpardonable delay there had been !'

John in the meanwhile sent off his telegram, and then, thinking of the further assistance that would be required, walked round to the Norwich Hospital to see if the house

surgeon could accompany him to Fritton, rightly judging he would be only too glad of the opportunity.

When that officer was informed the great London surgeon, Sir John Armstrong, desired to see him on important business, and was waiting in his room, he hurried thither with a sense of the most pleasurable expectancy.

Sir John Armstrong could not want to be shown over the hospital, for he had heard that he was once house surgeon himself, and it was proudly remembered how in that capacity he had performed an operation, the success of which set all Norwich talking.

What a crowd of memories, too, came back to John as he sat waiting in the old room he remembered so well. This had been his room, when his fortune was yet to make : when he was unknown and obscure, and his soul was yet innocent.

Here had taken place the first interview with Mary Elliot, when her elder sister brought her in all the pride of her youthful beauty, fondly solicitous as to her delicate health. Here, too, with all a mother's courage she had rebuked him for his thoughtless conduct, and had exacted a promise, which he would now have given all he possessed to have kept inviolate.

'Sir John Armstrong, what can I do for you?' said a youthful voice, as the door opened, and Mr Freshfield, the house surgeon, entered. 'This is indeed an honour.'

John explained the nature of the service he required, and asked the house surgeon whether he could accompany him, either to give the anæsthetic, or to assist, according as Dr Benson might desire.

Mr Freshfield replied with alacrity, that he was sure he could safely leave the institution for that purpose, so an arrangement was made to meet one another at the railway station at three o'clock.

About twenty minutes to four, John and Mr Freshfield steamed into Fritton station.

Dr Benson was waiting with a mail phaeton.

Now came a shock. John saw in a moment who Dr Benson was, and recollected the occasions on which he had met him previously.

For a moment he was so upset, as to be incapable of giving him a civil greeting. Both Dr Benson and Mr Freshfield were surprised, and thought he had been suddenly taken ill.

He recovered his presence of mind by an effort, and began to discuss with Dr Benson the symptoms of the patient, dismissing abruptly one or two allusions to their past acquaintance.

They then drove to Scrope Hall, and on the way John listened, while Dr Benson detailed the gravity of the patient's condition.

'It would have been too late to-morrow, Sir John,' he concluded, 'there can be no doubt of that. It is just possible something may be done to-day, and if it is to be done, you are the man to do it.'

On reaching Scrope Hall, an affecting scene took place between John and the parents of the patient.

'Oh, save my boy—my poor boy—' cried the mother imploringly, 'he is all we have! If you had an only son, you would know how I feel!'

John's face darkened; he had had an only son.

Sir James Scrope with tears in his eyes warmly pressed the surgeon's hands, exclaiming, 'You are the only staff on which we now lean!'

'I will do my best, Sir James,' 'you may be sure that nothing I can do shall be wanting, but—' and he took the baronet aside to be out of the hearing of the mother—'you must not be too sanguine, or place too much confidence on success, for it may be that nothing can be of service.'

Without losing more time they went into the sick-room, and John became all himself. Dr Benson and Mr Freshfield watched with awe, not unmixed with wonder, the change in the man. All the abstraction and listlessness which had been so marked a short time before had gone. All his natural powers seemed concentrated on his task—for in spite of progressive disease his hand had not yet lost its cunning, although there was a slight tremor in his fingers not noticeable in earlier years.

He was soon master of all the details that could be learnt of young Scrope's case, and with intuitive genius sketched out the line that operative measures would have to take to be successful.

With a few whispered directions to Mr Freshfield—for Dr Benson preferred to give the anæsthetic—he prepared to operate.

The patient himself had now gathered fresh hope from the confidence of the surgeon, and Sir James and Lady Scrope were anxiously awaiting the event in an adjoining room, listening to every sound: the poor mother picturing with anguish the ordeal her son was going through.

Mr Paget was with them, endeavouring to give comfort as far as he might, by pointing out the skill of the surgeon, his world-wide reputation, and by detailing instances where he had snatched the sufferer from the grave, when every hope seemed to be gone.

In the sick-room was silence broken only by the heavy breathing of the patient, and by an occasional word from the operator to the nurses, or his assistant.

There was an intense feeling of suspense as the operation proceeded. The crisis must soon be. Would the result be success? Would the patient live?

John, when he got into his work and began to unravel

the course of the disease, at first felt more than doubtful as to the final issue : it seemed more than human skill could remedy.

As, however, he went on with consummate care, allowing nothing to escape his eye, but steadily and skilfully endeavouring to re-establish what disease had undone, hope began to arise within him. What at first had seemed so serious was of less gravity than he had imagined, and in spite of the length of the operation, the patient was better towards the end than at the commencement.

There was a light of triumph in his eye, as he put the finishing touches to his work, and it was in a tone of exultation that he said to the other medical men present :

‘There, I don’t think anything could be better. The young man will have a fair chance.’

Then turning to one of the nurses, he said—

‘Go and tell Lady Scrope Sir John Armstrong has good hope that her son will do well.’

Never was messenger with promise of relief to beleaguered town, or bearer of reprieve to condemned captive more welcome than this message to the sad trio, who were awaiting the result in the now darkening room, for the evening was drawing in. Joy filled again the mother’s breast, and it seemed indeed as if the bitterness of death were past.

And as he had sympathised in their distress, so now was Mr Paget able to rejoice in their joy, and the ‘Thank God’ that burst from his lips had as much sincerity and warmth, as if it had been his own son who had been thus rescued from the jaws of death.

He shook hands with both mother and father, warmly congratulating them, and said he must now leave. They thanked him heartily for his support in their

trouble, for a true friend he had been in a time of need.

As the clergyman walked home along the quiet lanes in the fast fading light, he could not help feeling proud of John and his professional skill.

'Tis a great gift,' he said, 'almost as it were bringing to life again. How thankful he ought to be at being so blessed beyond others.'

Then with the unselfishness which was so characteristic of him, he thought how pleased Edith would be to hear of the great work her husband had accomplished. Looking at his watch, he saw he would have just time to catch a train to Norwich, and be back by another that reached Fritton at midnight.

So calling at the rectory to tell his housekeeper not to sit up, he was soon on the way to the railway station.

Edith's cheeks flushed, and she could not help feeling proud, as she listened to Mr Paget's enthusiastic description of her husband's success.

Yes, she did love him still, and it was wrong of her to feel so resentful towards him. If his absence had been caused by doing such work for others, her regrets were after all selfish and petty. She would speak to him that very night.

At this moment there was a loud knock at the door, and a minute later the servant brought her a telegram.

She eagerly opened it. It was from John. It ran :— 'Am returning to town by the night express—Urgent message—Will come down to funeral !'

The blood ran coldly through her veins. He was not coming, then !—Would only attend the funeral.

However urgent the message, why could he not have come to Norwich first ? He might have gone to London

by the first train in the morning. This was the way he always treated her.

The clergyman noticed the icy change in her manner, and she, perceiving his look of surprise, said coldly :—

‘Sir John has gone to London ; he will not be here to-night.’

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT HAPPENED AT ST BARNABAS

‘What if some little payne the passage have
That makes frayle flesh to fear the bitter wave,
Is not short payne well borne, that brings long ease,
And lays the soule to sleepe in quiet grave?’

AFTER her mother’s funeral, Edith remained with her father at Norwich, while John returned to London.

Dr Dawson was quite prostrated by the loss of his wife, and at first it seemed likely he would not survive her many months.

His health during the last year or two had been failing, and although he appeared to bear up bravely in public, Edith’s eye noticed the change, and saw that her father would never be again the man he had been.

His practice had been but little for some time past, and now he gave it up altogether, and lived strictly in retirement, being only occasionally seen with his daughter, walking with feeble gait through the streets of the town, or sitting with her in the old family pew at St Margaret’s. He had sufficient means to live quietly in retirement, and he steadfastly refused to leave Norwich and come to London, either to live with Edith or with his son.

As the weeks and months went by, and Edith still remained with her father, the latter became uneasy.

'It is kind, my dear, to look after your old father,' he said, 'but how about John? Don't you think it's a little hard on him, your absence all this time?'

'Oh, John doesn't miss me,' was the reply. 'He has got his work. He lives in that.'

Edith sighed as she said this, and Dr Dawson noticed the sigh and felt grieved. Edith's mother would never have spoken in this way of him. He was quite sure he would have missed her all these weeks.

John had always seemed kind to his daughter, and she had never complained, but he felt sure everything was not as it should be. Sometimes he would give voice to his misgivings in the hearing of Mr Paget, who had been a frequent visitor since his wife's death, and the clergyman felt uncomfortable at being made a confidant in the matter. Dr Dawson's doubts had been for a long time his own, but he did his best to hide them from the eyes of Edith's father.

'A busy professional life such as Sir John Armstrong leads is not the best suited for family relations,' he said on one occasion, when the old doctor had been particularly importunate in pressing his doubts. 'I am sure your daughter loves her husband, and only harm can come of interference. I think, however, if you will excuse my saying so, Dr Dawson, it might be better if Lady Armstrong were to return to London shortly. It is now nearly three months since her poor mother's death, and Sir John may not like to ask her to return, although he may possibly feel her absence.'

'You are right, Paget,' was the reply, 'and I wish you would speak to her on the subject. I have noticed she always has a great respect for your opinion.'

Mr Paget had not expected this. It had been a great

pleasure to make these calls on the doctor, especially as he nearly always saw Edith, and now he was asked to do his best to deprive himself of this pleasure.

Still the suggestion had come from him that Edith's place was by her husband's side, so he could not very well shrink from undertaking the duty.

A few days later the opportunity occurred, as he found Edith alone on making a call. With scarcely any preliminary remarks he went boldly to the point, 'My dear Lady Armstrong, how is your husband? He must miss you greatly, when do you think of returning?'

Edith was surprised by the question, and coldly replied, 'Really, Mr Paget, I don't think my husband misses me, his professional work keeps him fully occupied. I have only just lost my mother, and my father may not be here long, so I feel I am of more service here than I should be at home.'

Her words grated harshly on the other's ears. He thought he would not like his wife to speak like this. But it might be true, this that she said of Sir John. Was he really so careless of her absence?

'I feel sure you know your duty best,' he replied, 'but your father would be grieved if your husband took it amiss that you should be away so long.'

'My husband will let me know if he wants me, Mr Paget,' she rejoined, a little sarcastically, 'and my father need have no fear that he is aggrieved by my staying here.'

Nothing further was said on the subject, and Mr Paget could not help feeling a certain amount of satisfaction that he had failed in making Edith return, for he was getting quite accustomed to see her now; he was regularly in Norwich three times a week, and on most of these occasions he was in the habit of calling.

He did not, however, feel sure Edith was right in her

conduct, and this a little clouded his pleasure, for he could not brook to think his paragon in any way fell short of perfection, nor would he, even for her sake, diverge a hair's breadth from his notion of what was right and honourable.

In the meantime, John lived his lonely life in London. In proportion as he rose higher in professional reputation, the more miserable became his daily existence. He tried attending again the meetings of the learned societies he used to delight in ; but the celebrity he had attained made him so prominent there, that they became distasteful.

Often, therefore, he found himself sitting alone of an evening vainly trying to read, or busy himself in scientific work : in reality giving way to the morbid broodings of old, which had not become weakened by time.

In vain he tried social gatherings, they palled still more, as they had never been congenial to his tastes. Sometimes he visited Charley, and in his sister's family circle he found a certain amount of rest. Her familiar face brought back the home life of long ago, when his mind was free from all the troubles that had overwhelmed his manhood. Alice used to question him about Edith.

'When is she coming home ?' she asked. 'It must be lonely for you by yourself. You ought to have some one to look after you.'

He could only reply that he had plenty to keep him occupied, and that he supposed Dr Dawson required Edith's attendance.

'No, no, John,' rejoined his sister, 'Charley was down there the other day, and says his father is quite nicely again.'

John, to tell the truth, was a little uneasy at the long absence of his wife, but he was too proud to tell her so. The slightest hint on his part would have brought her at

once to his side : but the hint was never given, and so time drifted on.

Certain formal letters had come from Edith—formal indeed, to a casual eye, but not to the eye of affection. James Paget would have perceived at once the constraint of the writer, and the evident fear evinced by the wording of the letter, lest sentiments of too tender a character should crop out unwittingly.

To John the letters were formal, and nothing more. He could not read between the lines, and did not feel any resentment at the style in which they were written. It was true they were not like some he could recollect in the past, but things were changed since those days ; they were old married folks now, and tender sentiments would be out of place. Yet there was something odd in the prolonged absence which he did not understand : Edith had never acted like this before, and it was one more anxiety.

His health gave him increasing uneasiness. He had a conviction that the disease which had been suspected had made further progress : he had lately suffered from more prolonged attacks of giddiness, at times associated with sickness.

What if such attacks were to come on in the middle of an operation ! It might be the ruin of his reputation. He would soon be afraid to operate.

Very strange were the mental states he now and then fell into. He seemed as it were on the brink of a precipice, in imminent danger of falling over, and he felt as if a great calamity were impending, against which all precautions would be useless.

These fancies and delusions had hitherto been no bar to his work, but the gradual deterioration of his health was destined to have other results.

One day he had been giving a clinical lecture at St

Barnabas, which had been largely attended, and he was afterwards walking along the corridor of that institution with several of his colleagues on his way to the entrance, where his carriage was waiting. He was discussing the topic he had just been expounding, when his companions were startled by the sudden pallor which overspread his features.

In an instant he staggered, lurched forward, and would have fallen headlong, had he not been caught by Mr Morley, who was one of those accompanying him.

Assisted by the others, the latter carried John into the surgeons' room, and laid him on a couch, while the news spread like wildfire through the hospital that Sir John Armstrong had had a fit, and was lying in a precarious condition.

Great excitement consequently arose, and a report of what had happened soon spread to the public outside.

In the meanwhile restoratives were applied, and John rapidly recovered consciousness. He was greatly surprised on sitting up, at the anxious group round him. He could not in the least tell what had happened, and only remembered that he had been conversing with Mr Morley.

In a moment, however, he grasped the situation, and to the anxious inquiries of his colleagues he answered :—

‘I feel better now. It must have been a passing faintness. The lecture was a little too much for me. I will get home and rest.’

He drank a small quantity of brandy that had been fetched, and, thanking those present for their attention, was assisted to his carriage by Mr Morley.

‘That was a queer attack of Sir John Armstrong’s,’ said a house surgeon to another officer of St Barnabas, as the person alluded to passed through the doorway of the hospital. ‘I noticed the left side of the face was

convulsed. I wonder whether he has had epileptic seizures before ? ’

‘ It would be awkward,’ remarked the other, ‘ if he had a fit during an operation.’

‘ Did you hear his clinical ? ’ asked the house surgeon. ‘ It was something magnificent.’

‘ No,’ unfortunately, I was on duty, and couldn’t get there.’

The house surgeon was not the only one who had closely observed John during his attack. Mr Morley had likewise observed the symptom referred to. He had also thought that latterly John’s health had been impaired, and that his hand had been noticeably unsteady during operations. As he greatly admired John’s genius and surgical ability, he thought it his duty to call on him that evening to see how he was, and to speak on the subject of his health.

John when he reached home and the privacy of his room, became a prey to the most gloomy thoughts.

So the blow had come ! He was about to become subject to fits which might occur at any moment. If this were so, how should he be justified in performing any operation ?

All the business of his life was at an end. Othello’s occupation was gone !

What was there left to him ? Nothing—All was a blank.

He did not call to mind the wife who loved him, and whose affection he despised. He did not even think of her, so utterly absorbed in himself had he become.

He paced up and down the room, and then looked out of the window. It was a late autumn evening, and the outlook was a little dismal ; the rain was beating against the windows, and the lamps in the streets were being lighted.

As he looked out, a cab drove up to the door, and he saw Charley and his sister alight.

They were announced by a servant, and Alice came eagerly forward, and grasped John's hand. 'Oh, John, what is this we hear?' she cried, with a nervous tremor in her voice. 'The newspapers say you have had a fit. We have been so frightened.'

'Yes,' said her husband, 'a notice of your illness, John, has appeared in the evening papers.'

'Rumour, Alice,' replied her brother, 'always exaggerates. You see I am not ill. It is true I had a fainting fit at the hospital, but I was overdone, and wanted rest. I hadn't had anything to eat for a long time either, and wanted my dinner.'

As a matter of fact he had not touched any food since.

'I'm glad it's no worse,' said his sister, with a sigh of relief.

'I think, John,' said Charley, 'you ought to write at once to Edith. These papers will get down to Norwich, and may alarm her greatly.'

John promised to do so, and shortly after Charley and Alice left.

A little later Mr Morley called with Dr Noble. The former had been to Dr Noble, whom he knew to be intimate with John, had told all about the episode at the hospital, and had asked him to come that evening, to add the weight of his influence to induce John to take steps to prevent a break-down of his health.

As the two were ushered in, John looked up with surprise.

'Armstrong,' exclaimed Mr Morley, 'both Noble and myself have come to urge you to take rest, and give up your work for a time. After the attack to-day, we both think you ought not to remain under your present

pressure, at least, without a long holiday. From a pecuniary point of view it can scarcely be necessary to work so hard, and your health requires that you should make a decided change in your habits. 'You owe it, we think, both to your friends and to your profession to take all reasonable care of your health.'

'Morley is quite right,' interpolated Dr Noble, 'you must make a radical change. Go abroad for a month or two. You have not looked up to the mark for some time past.'

'You advise me kindly, no doubt,' replied John, 'but if I were to go away immediately after that attack this afternoon, what a confirmation it would seem of the exaggerated reports that are current, I hear, about the town. Would it, therefore, be wise to adopt such a course?'

'Then,' said Mr Morley, 'show yourself about for a few days, but make preparations for a prolonged holiday. Believe me, Armstrong, if you don't, the town may have something to talk about before long.—A medical man yourself, it is your duty, surely, to do as you would advise others?'

'Do we all do, Morley,' said John bitterly, 'as we advise our patients?'

'It might be better for our moral weight with the public,' remarked Dr Noble, 'if we did. Many of your humbler brethren are differently placed to yourself. The *res angusta domi* not infrequently prevents them from following advice, which otherwise they would gladly adopt. You have not their excuse.'

'My dear fellow,' answered John, 'You can't possibly tell what reason I might have for not adopting this course.'

'That may be,' was the reply, 'but I cannot conceive

of any that would justify you in incurring what might be a serious risk.'

Many arguments passed between the trio, but at length a promise was reluctantly extorted from John, that he would endeavour to take a prolonged holiday very shortly, and satisfied with this, Mr Morley and Dr Noble withdrew.

Left alone, John's mental storm began to rage more fiercely than ever.

His colleagues then were beginning to notice his health, and to picture his future breakdown. They should never witness it! They should never see the well-known surgeon a helpless paralytic! No, their last recollections of him should be very different!

Wilder and wilder became the thoughts that flitted through his brain, and closer into his being grew the hereditary disease that had remained dormant for more than two generations.

The idea of suicide that in the past had vaguely presented itself, now began to assume definite shape.

A change had come over him. His life seemed to be divided into two parts, and there was a gulf between them. One part—his past life—he saw behind with all its grim recollections. The other—the future—he could not see.

This evening was an eventful one. He was, in fact, on the brink of the Rubicon between mental health and disease: once on the other side, and there would be no recrossing.

Healthy impulses were still his, and they were up in revolt against the contemplated self-surrender. If deaf to the promptings of religious or ethical considerations, might not the cold, hard logic of materialistic philosophy yet restrain his rash intention.

The good angel armed himself with the weapons of the

man's own cynicism, and thereby attempted to show the vanity of self-destruction. 'Is it possible,' it seemed to say, 'that you, a surgeon, who have so often observed the vicissitudes of human life, can wish to run forward and meet death half way ?

'Foolish one ! is not death sufficiently near always ? Will he not find you soon enough without being sought ?

'Let it be granted you may please yourself as to ending your being ; why should you do so ? *Cui bono ?*

'You may yet make a bigger reputation, and do greater things. What if disease is undermining you, who is free from disease ? You are not disabled. Pause while there is still time.'

Said his bad angel, 'Why wait ? If you vacate your place now you will at least insure yourself against suffering and physical degradation, which you know only too surely must follow sooner or later. One of the great objects of your profession is to relieve pain. May you not then save yourself pain, pain it may be of a cruel and protracted character, by boldly cutting the knot.'

He fell into a reverie, and fitful and phantastic forms seemed to present themselves.

There was his old ancestor, who looked down exultingly and beckoned to him. There, too, was his father, who appeared sadder than he had ever known him, and stretched out his hands imploringly.

Then he fell into a heavy sleep, waking only in the small hours of the morning to retire to his bedroom, scarcely knowing what he did, and altogether forgetting to write to Edith, as he had promised Charley.

The following morning Edith was walking in the High Street at Norwich, when her eye caught the poster of one of the London daily papers, and she saw there in large letters :—

‘SUDDEN ILLNESS OF A WELL-KNOWN LONDON
SURGEON.’

Impelled by an instinct of approaching misfortune, she bought a copy, and turning to the paragraph indicated, read :—

‘Considerable anxiety was excited’ yesterday by the sudden illness of Sir John Armstrong. As he was leaving St Barnabas after the delivery of a lecture, he fainted, and was carried in a state of insensibility into the surgeons’ room. Here restoratives were applied with the best result, and we are happy to be able to report that Sir John was able to drive home in his own carriage.’

Edith had in her haste opened the newspaper in the shop of the newsagent, and he became alarmed at observing the emotion displayed on reading this announcement, for he thought she had been suddenly taken ill.

Refusing, however, his proffered assistance, Edith hurried out of the shop, and hastened home.

A great revulsion of feeling had taken possession of her. ‘If John had died,’ she said to herself, ‘I could never have forgiven myself. Mr Paget was right, I ought to have gone to London before ; my place is by my husband’s side, and every one would have cried shame, if anything had happened to John in my absence.’

On arriving at her father’s house she found that Mr Paget had just called.

‘Oh, Mr Paget,’ she cried, ‘John has been taken ill ! It is in the morning paper. I must go home at once.’

Mr Paget looked grave. ‘Nothing serious, I trust ?’ he replied.

She handed him the paper.

‘It is only a little passing faintness,’ he said en-

couragingly, after reading the paragraph, 'he is probably quite well again now. But you are right to return. Shall I wire to say you are coming?'

'Thank you,' was the reply, 'you are very good to think of everything.'

A telegram was accordingly sent to Cavendish Square to say Edith would return that evening.

Mr Paget was about to go to town, as he had business requiring his presence there : so it was arranged that he should escort Edith home, as it made no difference whether he went to London that evening or the following day.

Two hours later, just as they were about to enter the fly to go to the station, a telegram was brought from John. It ran :—'Am quite well again. Don't come up on my account.'

She handed the paper to the clergyman.

'There,' she said bitterly, 'you see I'm not wanted. Perhaps I had better stay here after all.'

'No, Lady Armstrong,' replied her companion, 'I think you should abide by your decision. After what has occurred there can be no question what you ought to do. Sir John's telegram may seem abrupt, but after all, perhaps it was dictated by good motives.'

The journey to town was a gloomy one. There was considerable restraint between the two.

Edith, with the usual feminine desire for sympathy, resented Mr Paget taking the part of her husband and endeavouring to excuse his conduct.

Mr Paget, on the other hand, was madly in love with Edith, and had only too much sympathy with her troubles. But he saw clearly enough his position, and would have died rather than in any way obtruded himself between Edith and John.

He was therefore very chary in encouraging confidences on the part of Edith.

When Liverpool Street was reached, he saw her into her carriage, and promised that he would occasionally call at Cavendish Square.

CHAPTER XIX

EMILY BURROWS HAS A STRANGE VISITOR

‘ This way madness lies.’

ON her return Edith found no change for the better in her husband : he was even more abrupt and thoughtless towards her than before.

But she did not feel the same resentment, for she noticed the alteration in his appearance, and how ill he was beginning to look. This, coupled with the recent occurrence at the hospital, made her terribly anxious.

What if she were going to lose her husband, as she had her child !

All the old affection, which was not dead, but only dormant through John’s neglect, was awakened ; and so great was her devotion and tenderness, that had his mind been less fatally affected, Edith must have conquered, and compelled him to make some return in acknowledgment of those merits in his wife that he could not fail to recognise.

She had soon learnt the tenor of the advice given by his medical friends, and did her utmost to induce John to carry it into effect.

He had been compelled to confess he could no longer do his work as heretofore, and had begun to decline numerous engagements ; and, as he had promised Dr

Noble and Mr Morley, preparations had been begun for an extended holiday.

The only difficulty was as to a companion. He was bent on going away by himself, and this no one approved of.

Edith passionately declared it was her right and duty to accompany him ; but her husband, with a sternness that cut her to the heart, declared he would go by himself, or not at all.

One evening in October, about three weeks after Edith's return, she and John were together in the drawing-room, and this subject was under discussion.

'How cruel you are, John,' said his wife, with tears in her eyes, 'to refuse to take me. What have I done to merit such unkind treatment? I have always loved you, and done my best to be a good wife. How can you be so unkind? You have been more unkind since our poor child was taken away. It is cruel—yes, it is—you ought to have more feeling for me'—and she seemed too heart-broken to cry.

'My dear Edith,' replied John, 'I don't reproach you. You have been an excellent wife. I daresay a better one than I deserved. But that is no reason why you should come with me if I go away. You don't want a holiday. Your only idea is to come as a nurse. Now, I won't have a nurse, and don't want to be looked after. If you came, it would cause me so much worry that the change would do me no good.'

'Cause you worry, John?' said his wife sadly, 'I wonder you can speak so. I am sorry you consider my company under any circumstances worry. You would not once have spoken like this. You know you are much too poorly to go away from everybody by yourself.'

'Well, dear, 'I've told you what I shall do, and that must be sufficient.' Her last words had ruffled

him. He knew he was not well, and that his wife spoke the simple truth, but none the less the truth was objectionable to him, as it is to many, and he disliked to be told 'he looked ill.'

'John,' piteously pleaded Edith, 'it will break my heart if you go alone. You know you must go if your health requires it. I cannot stand in the way. Do take me, I might never see you again!'

He started. What could Edith mean? Did she suspect him? He felt uneasy at her tender looks, and clumsily rejoined, 'You think I'm as bad as that, do you?'

'John, how can you say so?' and there was a touch of scorn in her voice. 'But what accidents might happen all those miles away, and if anything were to happen, and I not there. It is cruel, indeed it is!'—and she burst into a fit of passionate sobbing.

What a brute John would have appeared to James Paget had he been present! How indignant he would have been, and how readily he would have explained it all. 'You never loved your wife, never!'

He muttered to himself, 'To be sure there might be accidents:' then with forced tenderness he said, 'How can you be so foolish, Edith? Am I the first man who has gone to the south of France without his wife? Why should you conjure up the idea of accidents and other bogeys, to needlessly alarm yourself?'

Then with a thoughtlessness that only moral disease could justify, he continued: 'I'm sure you can do without me for a couple of months, you have been away at Norwich nearly a year.'

Edith at once ceased crying. 'Yes, John,' she said, and there was a faltering in her voice, 'I was wrong to stay away from you all that time, but I was in a bad temper,

and thought you had not treated poor mother as you should,' and again her voice failed her. 'Won't you forgive me,' she continued ; 'Mr Paget said I was wrong, but I wouldn't listen to him.'

'Oh, never mind, Edith, never mind all that,' testily replied her husband, 'of course I forgive you, but I don't see what Paget had to do with the matter. It's just the way with all parsons, they must have their fingers in everything.'

'Now, do try and be reasonable, Edith. If I go away now, I cannot take you with me. I want a change, and have long felt'—there was a listlessness in his voice—'that there must be a change sooner or later, and that I could not go on much longer as I have done.'

'What do you mean, John?' interrupted his wife. Why don't you alter your manner of life? I'm sure I should be glad enough if you would. John, could we not live a little more happily together,'—there was an eager, longing look, in her eyes—'like Charley and—your sister? How glad I should be, if we could. It has been so lonely all these years in London, so different to when we were at Driffild in the old times.'

She came near her husband, and tried to take his hand, but all her womanly tenderness was lost on him, and her words seemed rather to excite unpleasant reminiscences.

Ungraciously repulsing her advances, he replied :— 'There, Edith, that will do. Let the dead past bury its dead! Don't rake up old times. I'm sorry you've not been happy, and I daresay it has been all my fault. I don't blame you, but I never could have lived a different life. You ought to have married some one who would have made you a better husband.'

'Don't speak so, John,' said his wife mournfully, 'I never loved any one but you—but how changed you have become!' She thought of those bygone days

when John was everything to her. What happiness she had pictured in her wedded life with this man, who had seemed to her the ideal of all that was manly! It was true she had felt at the time she married him there was not the perfect union between them for which she had hoped. But in her sanguine expectation she had had little doubt that this union of hearts was bound to come, when it was permitted her to show how true a wife she could be.

Loving and true had she always been, but the union had never come. Indeed, almost heart-broken, during the last year or two, she had been forced to confess that they drifted apart rather than came nearer.

Now her husband was about to leave home for a foreign shore on account of failing health, and he refused her services. What a climax! He preferred to be attended by aliens rather than by the wife of his bosom!

Had he quite forgotten how she once watched night and day over him, when little hope seemed to be left, and the fierce fever seemed only too certain of his prey?

But it would do no good to remind him. Her heart seemed changed to stone. 'He cannot love me, he never could have loved me,' she thought.

There had been a long pause after Edith's last word, which was broken by John saying abruptly, 'Well, Edith, what is it to be? Am I to go, or to stay at home?'

'I have said all I shall ever say on the subject,' was her reply. 'You know that I would never stand in the way of anything that might be for your good.'

Could she have seen into the future she might have wished to have done anything to prevent his going. But had she prevented it, who shall say it would have been for his good, or for hers?

It was finally decided that John should go to the south of France for two months, and that he should start the following week.

That last week was terribly sad for Edith ; John was so altered, and as he did less professional work, he was more with her, and she was better able to note the change. All cheerfulness had gone out of his life, and a complete melancholy had settled down upon him. In vain she tried to rouse him to a more healthy state of mind, he seemed to resent attention being directed towards him.

She anxiously spoke to her brother.

'You know, Charley,' she said, 'John is so strange : I don't think he ought to go away by himself. Last night I found him in his study looking over his will.'

'Looking over his will ?' replied her brother, 'are you sure it was his will ?'

'Yes,' 'I caught sight of the word "Will" printed on the outside, as he folded up the paper and put it away hastily.'

Charley was a little troubled, and did not know quite what to say ; but he tried to cheer his sister, seeing how unhappy she was.

'I think, Edith,' he said, 'it is better that John should go away for a holiday, even if he goes by himself. All his colleagues recommend it, and they ought to know best. Let us hope we shall see him come back quite another man.'

'Oh, Charley, I do hope it will be so !' replied his sister with tears in her eyes.

Two days before his departure, John said to his wife, 'I shall be away, dear, most of to-day, and possibly not return to-night. I have promised to call on Sir James Scrope to see his son before I leave England, and shall therefore go to Fritton this afternoon. I

may then go on to Norwich, if the return trains do not suit.'

'If you do, John,' replied Edith, 'don't forget to call and see father.'

John promised he would not forget, and the afternoon found him on his way to Fritton. Arrived there, however, he did not make for Scrope Hall, but turned in quite another direction.

It was past five o'clock, and getting dusk; he seemed to try to escape observation as he walked through the village.

He sought the church which was just outside the village. On reaching the lych-gate of the churchyard he first looked round to see if any one were in sight, and then quietly raised the latch and entered.

He sought one particular grave, which was not easy to find in the fast fading daylight.

Instinct seemed to guide his footsteps, and after a short search he stopped before one on which were some faded wreaths, showing that it was not altogether forgotten.

On the headstone might have been read the following :—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY

OF

MARY ELLIOT

The beloved daughter of William Elliot of Northcote Farm, who was
found drowned in Fritton Broad on August . . 18 . .
in the twentieth year of her age.

For more than half-an-hour John stood by the side of this grave, his mind the field of conflicting emotions.

He could scarcely tell why he had come here—to this place of all others—but some irresistible impulse seemed to have been guiding his footsteps.

It was a false excuse he had made for his journey, as he had no intention of calling on Sir James Scrope, neither had he promised to see the baronet's son. A day or two before, he had not dreamt of making this excursion, and it was only suggested by a sudden impulse of his mind.

But it was a fact, only too significant, that he had now reached a stage where impulses, which might be irresistible, were beginning to make themselves felt, and to rule his conduct.

A mental pathologist, had he recognised this symptom, would have been more than doubtful of the wisdom of the solitary holiday about to be taken abroad.

As John stood by the grave the past rose terribly clear before him. He saw again the bright, laughing girl, his one and only love, whom he had betrayed more than ten years before.

Some Nemesis seemed to have been following him in spite of his prosperity.

'Joe is dead,' he muttered, 'and he said nothing. No living-soul knows of the part I played ;' and a voice within his own breast seemed to answer mockingly, 'But *you* know. That it is which causes all your trouble. It is that knowledge which is driving you on to destruction.'

He shuddered and turned away, and groped blindly along the path to the gate. It was now quite dark, and a drizzling rain had begun to fall.

As he passed under the lamp suspended over the gate, the Rev. James Paget was leaving the rectory garden, and caught sight of his face, faintly illumined by the light which fell from above.

He started. Surely he saw Sir John Armstrong?

But the figure rapidly disappeared, and he reflected how impossible it would be that Sir John Armstrong should be taking a walk at such an hour in Fritton churchyard.

Paget

In the meanwhile John stumbled blindly on. Another impulse had taken possession of him. He had an irresistible desire to see Emily, the sister of the unhappy girl, and confess his own part in the ruin of the latter.

This was a strange proceeding! At the grave he had just been reflecting that his past handiwork was known to no one living, and now he was about to publish it afresh. How could such inconsistency be explained?

Alas! only in one way; John had ceased to be accountable for his actions.

Emily was no longer Emily Elliot, but Emily Burrows. She had stayed with her father till his death a few years before, and then after some persuasion had consented to marry George, who had been struck by the care and attention with which she had nursed her father, as well as by her homely and thrifeful ways. He had never, however, quite got over his former sweetheart's sad end.

Emily was now the happy mother of several children, and probably made George a better wife than her sister would ever have done, but she could never quite get over the feeling that she was usurping poor Mary's place.

On reaching Southwick Farm John inquired for Mrs Burrows.

It chanced that her husband was out, and Emily was alone in the parlour. She was older than when we saw her last, but a look of health and happiness was on her face. She sat before a bright fire, with a lamp on the table in front of her; and there was a litter of articles upon the table, that showed the mother was busy with her children's wardrobe.

As John entered Emily rose to receive him, and in spite of the alteration in his features she recognised him at once.

With face glowing with pride at his visit, and forgetting his title, so strong was the recollection of the past, she said, 'Dr Armstrong! This is indeed a surprise! My husband *will* be proud to see you.'

Then noticing his pale face and nervous trepidation, she added in a lower tone, 'But you don't look well, sir.'

'Mrs Burrows,' began John, pausing between his words, and with a perceptible stammer, as if his tongue had some difficulty in formulating the words he was about to utter, 'I wanted particularly to see you by yourself, and it fortunately happens that you are alone'—he stopped, and looked furtively round the room, as if to be sure of this fact, while Emily glanced up with astonishment, not altogether free from a certain uneasiness as to what was about to follow:—'I come on a sad errand,' continued her visitor, 'and it refers to the past,'—Emily now turned pale, and felt her heart beating wildly—'I come to speak of your poor sister Mary.'

He paused, and Emily rose up from her chair and stretched out her hands imploringly towards him, crying, 'Oh, Dr Armstrong, Dr Armstrong, for God's sake don't recall that time, the most miserable of my whole life. It killed my father,'—and she covered her face with her hands, as if to hide a vision of the past.

'I know it is painful,' said John, 'but I must speak. Have you ever thought, Mrs Burrows, who the wretched man might be, who betrayed Mary?'

'No,' she replied, with a shudder, 'May God forgive him, for I never could!'

'I come to speak of that man. I can tell you who he was.'

A horrible fear came over Emily—a sudden light flashed through her mind—ten years slipped away and she once more stood in the house-surgeon's

room at the Norwich hospital, listening to the solemn promise of him that stood before her. But she could not bear to hear the confession of his perfidy, so with calm dignity she said, 'No, Dr Armstrong, do not tell me. I charge you in my dead sister's name not to tell me.'

John had a little recovered himself, and said slowly, and deliberately, 'Ah, well, you said you never could forgive him, let us hope God may. Good-night!'

He held out his hand mechanically, but saw the other shrinking from his touch.

A minute later Emily heard his footsteps on the gravel outside.

A great excitement now came upon her. What was she to do?

Sir John Armstrong the cowardly betrayer of her sister! What would happen if she told George? Ought she not to tell him? She must have some advice.

Instinctively she thought of Mr Paget, and a few minutes later she had her bonnet on, and was struggling through the rain on her way to the rectory.

Mr Paget had just returned from visiting a parishioner, when he was told that Mrs Burrows wished to see him.

'What can she want?' thought the clergyman. 'Nothing wrong at Southwick, I hope. Show her in here, Lucy,' he said to the maid.

A minute later Emily was sitting in the rectory study almost as breathless and excited as she had been in this same room on another memorable occasion.

Time had brought its changes, but in the passionate and resolute matron, Mr Paget recognised in a moment the Emily of those days, and almost by intuition knew that her errand that night had reference to the tragedy of the past, that it was in truth Sir John Armstrong he

had seen coming forth from the churchyard, and now it was not unlikely the past was about to be made manifest.

His task, too, as a spiritual counsellor might be by no means an easy one.

‘Mr Paget,’ said his visitor, ‘something very dreadful has happened to-night. I have come for your advice, which I need sorely, as I do not know what to do. Mr Paget, my sister’s murderer is living, I have seen him this evening, he is—’ the clergyman’s heart seemed to stand still—‘Sir John Armstrong! What am I to do?’ she exclaimed passionately. ‘Shall I tell George?’

‘Are you sure this is so?’

‘Only too sure, sir.’ ‘I could not bear to hear him confess it in so many words, and told him to desist, but there could be no mistake—no mistake—’ and a sob burst from her lips. ‘Oh, Mr Paget, I once thought,’ she continued, ‘I should like to know who ruined my sister, that I might see him punished, but now I wish ten times over I might never have known! The knowing seems nearly as dreadful as poor Mary’s death.’

‘Yes, Mrs Burrows,’ said the clergyman sympathetically, ‘you are feeling now what many another has felt before, how unnecessary it is for us to seek to punish the ill-doings of others. God’s ways are not our ways, but how terribly relentless they not infrequently are towards the evil-doer.’

‘The betrayer of your sister was guilty of a heartless and wicked action, but think what Sir John Armstrong must have gone through before he could have been driven to act as he has done this evening! How the proud heart must have been crushed and broken!’

‘Mrs Burrows, an hour ago I saw Sir John leaving the churchyard yonder. I thought I recognised him, but was not quite sure. What you have told me, how-

ever, makes it certain. Where do you think he had been? Can you have any doubt?

'Mrs Burrows, I charge you in God's name to let this go no further! Think of his innocent wife! None but the innocent can suffer by making public such a revelation. The guilty one is suffering, as you can see, only too severely: and no court, no public opprobrium could award retribution equal to his own remorse. It is easy to see that God has determined that he himself shall be the minister of his own punishment.'

She listened with bowed head to the rector, and when he had concluded, said, 'The course you bid me follow, sir, is the easier one. None can shrink more from publicity than I, and I would far rather tell no one—no, not even George. I feel sure Mary would wish it so, and I think,' after a pause, 'father too.'

'I thank God, Mrs Burrows,' said the other, 'that you have such feelings, and I cannot but regard them as heaven-sent. Let us both pray for this wretched man, one of the most gifted surgeons of the day. Only quite recently I heard that he had had a fit, while visiting one of the London hospitals. It may be that before long he will have to meet your sister, and plead his cause before another Tribunal.'

There was a look of consolation on Emily's face as she left the rectory. She felt sure the clergyman's advice was good, and when she remembered the sad tones of Sir John Armstrong's voice, and the look of pain on his face as she shrank away from him, a wave of compassion surged up within her. She thought, too, of Lady Armstrong—Edith Dawson that was—and old Dr Dawson, so well remembered by her, and so respected at Norwich; and she devoutly thanked God that she was not called upon to take steps, which might be fraught with unspeakable sorrow to them.

Left alone, the rector thought long and anxiously of what he had just heard. The vague suspicions floating through his mind for so many years, were after all only too true ; and he sighed when he reflected on the cloud that was fast gathering over Edith's head.

As to the advice he had given Emily Burrows, was it altogether honest ; or had his love for Edith more than strict equity prompted him, in advising the poor victim's sister to abstain from taking steps to brand the betrayer ?

'No, no,' he said to himself. 'God knows I feel only too keenly anything that may even remotely affect Edith's welfare, but I am persuaded I have done right in this, and were Sir John Armstrong and his wife strangers, my counsel would have been still the same.'

His mind then reverted to the old times at Norwich, when he was curate at St Margaret's : to the meetings and arguments in John's room at the hospital in those days, and to his own presentiment as to the moral calibre of the young surgeon. How terribly true had this presentiment been !

He could not see into the future, but he felt that evening as if some greater evil were impending ; before retiring to rest his soul went up in prayer to his Master, to have compassion on his ill-fated friend, and to guard Edith in the dark time coming on. *a lot of us*

CHAPTER XX

SIR JOHN ARMSTRONG'S LAST JOURNEY

‘ Though this be madness, yet,
There’s method in it—’

It was the evening of the 31st of October. There had been a heavy fall of rain in the morning, and now a fog hung over the city.

Sir John Armstrong’s carriage was at the door, and all ready for his departure to catch the Continental express at Cannon Street.

John was in the drawing-room taking a farewell of his wife, who with tears in her eyes was clinging to him, and lamenting his going.

‘ What if I were never to see you again ! ’ she said. ‘ John, I don’t like your going away. Oh, why would you not take me with you ? ’

‘ Now, dear,’ was the reply, ‘ please don’t go over that again. I daresay you will see me when I return. If an accident were to happen, the same accident might happen anywhere else. No one can insure against accidents, only against their consequences, and in that respect you’re quite safe.’

‘ How strangely you speak, John,’ said his wife in a

frightened voice. 'Why do you lay this stress on accidents? One would think you expected one.'

'Don't be foolish, Edith; how can I expect an accident? Goodbye, I must be off, or I shall lose the train.'

Edith felt a kiss upon her forehead, then she heard the drawing-room door shut, and was alone. Alone! destined never more to see him, who, during the greater part of her life, had been the centre of her existence, whom in spite of coldness and indifference she yet loved as dearly as ever wife loved husband.

But her love now differed from her earlier love. Then there was the hope that it might be mutual; but latterly she had become more and more certain that this love of hers had never been felt by John, that however dearly she might love him, there could be no return.

Yet she loved on, hoping against hope, as every true woman does, that her own fervour might in time breathe warmth into the coldest heart.

She walked to the window. There in the square below she saw the lamps of the carriage, and a gleam of light from the hall lit up for an instant the pale face of her husband, as the footman opened the carriage door. Then came the rumble of the wheels, and all was swallowed up in the fog.

In the meanwhile, John was driven quickly eastwards. He had crossed the threshold of his house for the last time, had taken his last look at a home, which but for his own fault might have been a happy one.

Outwardly there was not much change; inwardly, there was a terrible alteration. Indeed, it was more than a change, it was a revolution; the remorse-stricken mind had at last given way, and a disease, dormant in his family for generations, had claimed another victim.

But subtle and obscure was the malady, and it

would have been a master mind that could have detected it.

All John's faculties to the outside world seemed as true as ever : no delusions were to be observed : but all the natural ability and genius that he possessed in so signal a degree, were being directed to the undoing of their lord.

He had determined to destroy himself, but he contemplated doing so in such a manner, that no living soul should understand the manner of his end.

His life had been honourable in the sight of the world, and death should not dim the reputation he had won, nor afford a means of tarnishing his fame.

When he ceased to be, Mary would be appeased, and no further evil would result from his sin. It was true he had played a reckless part in his interview with Emily Burrows : she could scarcely misunderstand him, and it must be confessed the ingenuity with which he had laid his plans was somewhat marred in this respect. But if in the case of the most intelligent and healthy intellects, the best laid schemes not infrequently fail owing to a trifling omission, is it wonderful that the scheming of a diseased mind should be likewise faulty in some of its details ?

Cunning and specious as was John's design, it would in all likelihood have failed, had it depended entirely upon himself. For he could not in the least have foreseen that the sister of the woman he had wronged, instead of following the first and most natural impulse of an ordinary mind, would have sought the council of such an adviser as Mr Paget.

Except for that circumstance, it is more than probable that rumours, not altogether wanting in truth, would have got abroad—rumours that might have been damaging in the extreme, and have thrown light on events that happened subsequently.

On through the darkness went the express.

John sat in one corner of the carriage, muffled in a travelling coat, for it was a cold evening. He had mechanically lighted a cigar, but such was his abstraction that it soon went out. The fact that he was not aware of this, but still held the cigar between his lips, excited the attention of some of his fellow travellers.

Two young men were seated opposite in high spirits: they were clerks in a banking house, who had to wait for their holiday till this late season of the year, and they were bubbling over with good spirits in anticipation of the gay time about to be had in the French Capital.

Every now and again they cast curious glances at the strange man in the corner with the extinguished cigar in his mouth.

One of them getting up to stretch himself, caught sight of John's portmanteau on the luggage rest above, and read with awe:—

SIR JOHN ARMSTRONG,
Hotel Bristol,
Paris.

Sitting down he nudged his companion. 'That gentleman in the corner,' he whispered, 'is Sir John Armstrong, the surgeon; he is going to the "Bristol." Cook's tickets won't run to that, will they?'

His companion laughed. 'Oh, the Bristol is a stuck-up sort of place where they fleece you awfully. We shall be much more comfortable at the "St Petersburgs."'

'He's not getting much out of his cigar,' remarked the other. 'Shall I offer him a light?'

'Hush, don't speak so loud.'

John in a dreamy way heard them conversing, and marked their happy tones and glowing faces, but they seemed strange and unnatural to him.

At length Newhaven was reached, and leaving the rail-

way station, he saw the smoke rising from the funnels of the packet, which was to carry him on his last voyage.

This did not occur to him, for he could not be said to be thinking of anything. His mind was more like that of the condemned man, who must die at daybreak, and who in his prison cell counts the hours as they go by with a feeling that he is powerless to avert his fate; or like the sick man, who has been told by his physician that life is ebbing, and he will not look upon another sunrise.

Could John be regarded as a free agent? Self-control in one respect was utterly in abeyance, and nothing could have saved him but physical restraint, and that under the circumstances was impossible.

After a short delay the packet started, and John watched the lights of Newhaven receding from view.

It was a cold, foggy night, and the wind was rising. The sea was rough, and the motion of the vessel soon drove the few passengers into the cabin.

John walked to the stern, and looked down at the white, seething waters beneath, as they were churned up by the screw. He then tossed into the sea a periodical he held in his hand, and saw it instantly disappear.

After leaning against the side for a few minutes he slowly turned away, retraced his steps along the deck, and descended into the saloon.

'A nasty night, Sir John,' said a voice in his ear. He started, and looked in the direction from whence it came, and at once recognised the speaker.

'Good evening, Dr Benson,' he said, 'you are crossing to-night!'

'Yes, I have been summoned to an old patient who was taken ill at the Hotel Scribe in Paris. So I believe we are fellow travellers.'

A sickly smile stole over the face of the other. Fellow travellers they? Their ways were widely apart! But how strange that this man who had looked upon his face immediately after the commission of his sin, should cross his path now!

Dr Benson was a little alarmed at John's look. There was something wild about the expression of his features; an unnatural light seemed to gleam from his eyes.

He had read in the papers of his sudden illness at St Barnabas, and knew of his proposed holiday.

'I hope,' he added, 'you will return the better for your change, and that your health will be re-established. We can't afford to lose you for long.'

'Oh, my health is all right,' said John, a little testily, 'but I don't like the motion of the boat, so I shall turn in.'

So saying, he abruptly left the other, and sought his berth, in which he lay down,—not to sleep, but only to listen to the fog signals above, for the packet had now entered a dense mist.

Dr Benson watched him into his berth, and then sat down and ordered a light supper. 'What a strange man the baronet is,' he thought. 'He was again quite startled at seeing me. One would think I had done him some harm, he seems to shun me so. I've sent him good patients, so he ought to be civil. But there's something odd about him I don't understand.'

Shortly after, he also retired to his berth.

About an hour later, the two clerks, who had been John's fellow travellers in the railway carriage, after staying as long as they could hold out on the deck, returned to the saloon for shelter.

They sat down to partake of a little refreshment, and while it was being brought, observed John muffled in the same coat he had worn in the railway carriage, and

with a smoking cap on his head, making his way to the saloon staircase.

Almost immediately after the steward brought their refreshments, and they remarked what they had just seen.

‘He’ll find it a rough night, steward, won’t he?’ said one of them. ‘The fog was so thick just now we couldn’t see a foot in front.’

‘I expect the gent feels ill,’ was the reply, ‘that’s why he’s gone above. It’s foolish. I always tell gents to lie still if they feel sick. He’ll soon be down again.’

John was indeed sick, but his was a sickness that they, like the rest of the world, but little comprehended.

When he reached the deck one bell was being struck.

The sound rang like a knell: it was the last bell he was to hear: but what mattered limitation of time to him, who so soon was to be a part of the eternal!

The packet was in the centre of a sea-fog; the hooter was giving every few minutes its harsh warning; a drenching rain was falling, and scarcely anything could be conceived more miserable than the general appearance of the deck.

The officers and sailors appeared as dark forms with large slouching tarpaulin hats, and waterproofs, and at intervals they flitted by like ghosts, being almost immediately swallowed up in the fog.

Not a passenger was on deck as John groped his way towards the stern. Having gained it, he leaned over the bulwarks, and tried to peer into the depths below.

He could not see the water, but he could hear it hissing and boiling beneath. It was bitterly cold. He shivered, and his teeth chattered, but he did not draw his coat closer.

No one was by, he was quite alone.

But had there been an observer his attention would have been riveted by John's next step. There was a coil of rope, which formed an elevation just behind the wheel, and by the side of the stern bulwarks. Carefully mounting it he steadied himself, by grasping the pole on which the flag with the name of the packet was flying. He then stepped on to the bulwark itself, still grasping firmly the same support.

Except for the fog he might now have been seen by the man on the look-out ; but the fog was so thick, that it was impossible for the look-out man to see more than a few feet in front, and his attention was directed to the course in which the vessel was moving.

For about the space of a minute, John stood like a statue, glaring wildly into the darkness. The outer world was quite shut out, he heard and saw nothing.

But there in the abyss below was the form of the drowned Mary Elliot, and in the roar of the waters he heard her calling.

It was a brief but awful interval that he stood thus, looking into the black gulf below with all the frenzy of death in his eyes.

What a wicked deed was that about to be perpetrated ! This self-murder, how could it be justified ? The great surgeon, whose genius had given life to so many sufferers, whose peer could hardly be found, about to destroy that divine gift, to make it so that none of his brethren among suffering humanity should ever again be the better for what God had bestowed for their service.

Unless all were blind chance—unless there were no Creator, no retribution for sin—surely he might expect to answer for this deed in the great hereafter !

What was his own selfish trouble and pain, compared with the duties which were his in proportion to his

talents? To whom much has been given, of them shall be much required!

What right had he to forestall disease? How should he atone for one sin by the commission of a greater sin?

Alas! there was little room for reason: the only defence that might be urged for the rash act, was that reason was in abeyance; that the guiding impulses of the frail human vessel that had been freighted with such precious metal, had given place to the delusions of a madman, and that the responsibility of health had given place to the irresponsibility of disease.

In this supreme moment there was a reaction to a more healthy state, and there seemed to rise within, a sense of the enormity of the act contemplated. But he had gone too far for repentance: the *fiat* had gone forth from a higher power, and it was too late.

At the same instant what had occurred at St Barnabas was repeated, and conscious life departed. But now no kind friends were in attendance to bear him into a place of safety, so with a gasp and a convulsive movement of his body he pitched headlong into the sea.

On went the packet. The noise of the fall attracted no attention, as the sound was more than covered by the roar of the sea surging up from the screw, and not a soul in the ship knew of the tragedy that had been enacted.

The clerks who had seen John leave the cabin had gone to lie down in their berths; and the steward, busy with his duties, thought no more of the matter.

Indeed, except for the presence of Dr Benson on board, it is not unlikely that considerable doubt might have remained as to the fate of the baronet.

For if his disappearance had not been discovered before the passengers disembarked at Dieppe in the dark early

morning, attention might only have been drawn to him by the fact that no one came to claim his luggage ; as it might have been thought that he had left the packet with the other passengers, intending later on to send for his things.

About an hour, however, before the boat arrived at Dieppe, Dr Benson saw John's watch, a valuable gold one with a ponderous seal attached, hanging over the edge of his berth. Thinking to rescue it from a dangerous position, he crossed over to the baronet's berth.

He was surprised to find it empty ; but thinking John might be taking a stroll on deck, he took possession of the watch and went up to find him.

The fog had now cleared a little, and it was possible to see better.

Dr Benson went carefully over the boat, but failed to find the object of his search. He became alarmed, and reported to the steward that the baronet was missing.

The news at once spread over the packet. The captain was informed, and a rigorous search made everywhere without success.

The steward reported that his attention was drawn to the baronet's going on deck by some of the passengers, and that this was just before one bell sounded.

There could be little doubt, that in some way or other he had fallen overboard, and there were many curious surmises as to how the accident happened, as it was difficult to conceive that he could have put himself into a position in which it would be possible.

There was not, however, the remotest suspicion of the real circumstances of the case.

Dr Benson felt in a painful position, for it devolved on him to wire to Sir John Armstrong's friends to inform them of the sad news. On arriving at Dieppe he found

it too early to telegraph, and instead of going on by the tidal train, he decided to wait for a later, and in the meanwhile considered anxiously how to send the tidings of Sir John Armstrong's death.

Well he knew that directly the office was open, telegrams would rapidly be sent to London, and be published in the morning papers. He was aware that Sir John had a brother-in-law who was a solicitor, but did not know his address.

He likewise knew that the Rev. James Paget, the rector of his parish, was a very old friend of the family.

Finally, rather than telegraph direct to Lady Armstrong, he determined to wire first to Mr Paget, trusting the latter would have time to send the information to the wife's brother, before the news of her husband's death was rudely reported in the newspapers.

At the earliest possible moment, therefore, he dispatched the following telegram to Fritton Rectory :—

'Sad accident crossing to Dieppe—Sir John Armstrong missing—drowned. Please inform friends. Dr Benson.'

Had a thunderbolt fallen into the rectory parlour, it could not have dismayed Mr Paget more than did the receipt of this telegram.

Sir John Armstrong dead—drowned? What did it all mean? He had never in the remotest degree expected this.

It was true he had had misgivings that further trouble was brewing in that quarter, and had become anxious when reflecting on Edith's future. But that her unhappy husband was so soon to be hurried out of the world, had not for a moment entered into his calculations.

But it was no time to be idle. He must act at once.

The news would soon be all over London, if it were not so already. He must wire to Charles Dawson, and then himself hurry up to London by the first train.

Sitting in the railway carriage, many and conflicting were his thoughts.

He was about to try to comfort a wife for the loss of her husband : a woman whom he had loved all his life, and who was by that loss rendered free to be wooed in the future.

The loss, therefore, in one sense was an incalculable gain ; yet he was about to condole with that woman, to pretend grief for the loss of the man, who had stood in his way, and whose treatment of Edith he had over and over again condemned. Was he not in a measure playing the part of a hypocrite ?

'No,' he said, 'this is not the right way of regarding it. I cannot help my natural feelings, and have no need to be ashamed of them. My sacred office is to comfort the afflicted, and that Lady Armstrong will be terribly stricken by this blow, I have no doubt. I may be able to soothe her grief, and if God permit me to comfort her, I am no hypocrite. My own feelings are altogether beside the question.'

On reaching Liverpool Street he hurried to Cavendish Square. On the way he caught sight of posters outside the newspaper shops with the announcement, 'REPORTED DEATH OF SIR JOHN ARMSTRONG.'

'It is known, then,' he said to himself, 'ill news does not take long to travel,' and he stopped and purchased a copy of the newspaper.

When he arrived at the house, he found there Charley and his wife. They had forestalled the newspapers, but were in a terrible state of anxiety.

'It has nearly killed Edith,' whispered Charley to the clergyman, while Alice sobbed bitterly. 'I have sent

for Dr Noble, as my poor sister fainted, and I got alarmed. I don't know what to do. It's shocking !'

Charley was pale and trembling, and looked greatly affected by the terrible event.

'You don't know how it occurred, do you ?' he said.

'Mr Paget shook his head, and handed him the telegram received from Dr Benson. He also showed him the newspaper.

'It would appear from the report,' he answered, referring to the newspaper, 'no one saw him fall overboard. He was simply found missing. But there will be fuller details, it may be, later.'

Dr Noble entered the room.

He looked grave, and approaching the anxious group, said, 'Lady Armstrong ought not to be left by herself, she has had a severe shock.'

'Would it be wise for this gentleman, to see her, doctor ?' asked Charley, pointing to Mr Paget. 'He is a very old friend, and has come up from Norwich this morning.'

'It would do no harm,' replied the doctor, glancing at the clergyman. He then added, 'Are you not Mr Paget ?' and finding his conjecture correct, continued, 'Lady Armstrong mentioned your name just now. She was reproving herself for not having been guided by your advice. I surmised you were a clergyman.'

Mr Paget bowed, and Charley said hastily, 'Yes, Paget, you had better see her. I know you have some influence over her.'

Mr Paget's heart was again wildly beating. She had thought of him then in her distress. How she loved John Armstrong ! How mad he must have been not to have valued more so priceless a possession !

He at once proceeded to Edith's apartment, accompanied by Alice, while the doctor, after giving a few more

directions, and promising to call again in the evening, hastened to his carriage.

Edith was sitting before the fire in the drawing-room, her face buried in her hands, and taking no notice of anything, as Mr Paget entered with Alice.

It was the same room in which the clergyman had had his interview with her not so long ago, when her child was lying dead, and he could not help recalling that occasion. She was sad then, but altogether prostrated now.

'Edith,' said Alice, 'Dr Noble has ordered you rest and quiet, and here is Mr Paget, who has just called. We thought you would like to see him.' Then she somewhat rashly added, 'It was he who first learnt the dreadful news.'

Edith started up, raised her pale face, and stared wildly at Mr Paget, saying in tones broken by emotion:—

'How was it, Mr Paget, you came to hear of poor John?'

'It was through one of my parishioners, Lady Armstrong, a medical man who lives at Fritton, and happened to be a fellow traveller with your husband. It devolved on him to send home the sad tidings. He did not like to wire directly to you, and as he knew I was a friend of your family, he sent me the telegram. It was through me your brother heard of the sad event.'

Edith got up from her chair, walked towards the clergyman, and held out her hand.

'Thank you—thank you,' she said. 'It was kind to come up this morning, and leave everything on my account.'

Then she trembled, and would have fallen, but Alice came to her assistance, and with Mr Paget's help led her back to a chair.

'Yes,' she said, 'you have always been a friend. John

is dead ! How strange it all seems ! Don't you remember long ago, how kind you were, when you thought John was neglecting me on that excursion we once made together to Yarmouth. It was in November, this very month. You thought John was too attentive to a girl who was with us, who met with an accident. That girl, too, was drowned,'—she shuddered,—‘and now John is drowned.’

‘What does it all mean, Mr Paget?’ and her highly-wrought feelings came to a climax in a fit of hysterical sobbing.

Mr Paget did not know how to answer her, and was shocked to find there was in Edith's mind so strong a remembrance of the past—a remembrance which might yet unveil the nature of her husband's sin. But he urged her to do as Dr Noble advised—to give quiet to her nerves, and allow the shock she had received to subside.

‘But, Mr Paget,’ she sobbed, ‘you will let me know anything more you discover—if my poor husband be found?’

‘Oh, yes, Lady Armstrong, I will take care to let you know all.’

Alice then led Edith away, and Mr Paget went downstairs to Charley.

‘I will try and see the captain of the packet,’ he said to the latter, ‘and ascertain, if possible, further particulars of this sad affair.’

‘You are very kind,’ answered Charley, ‘it does seem remarkable ! How could John have got overboard ? If he did take a walk on deck at a late hour, and even in a fog, I don't see how it could have happened, unless he jumped over.’

The other shook his head. ‘God alone knows,’ he said ; ‘perhaps this is one of those mysteries that never will be unravelled.’

The following day Mr Paget proceeded to Newhaven, and was able to see the captain of the packet. Very little satisfaction, however, could he obtain from all his inquiries.

'Yes, sir,' said the captain, 'it were a very foggy night; the sea, too, was rough, and all of us were engaged in the look-out ahead. None of us saw the gentleman on deck, and if he'd fallen overboard anigh the stern, what with the noise from the screw, and the sea, we could na' have heard the fall. If we had seen him fall, we could na' have saved him.'

'But, captain,' asked Mr Paget, 'if Sir John Armstrong did go on deck that night, how came he to fall overboard? Can you imagine any way in which the accident could have happened?'

The other shook his head in a mystified manner. 'No, sir,' he replied, 'that's what puzzles me; I should ha' thought it impossible for him to ha' got into the sea—unless he jumped overboard—which, of course, he couldna' ha' done—' he added after a pause.

Mr Paget interrogated the steward likewise, but could get no further information. He had noticed nothing peculiar in the baronet; he might have been somewhat quiet and depressed, but he (the steward) had ascribed it to sea-sickness, and had thought that was the cause of his going on deck so late.

'Had John been sick in the cabin?'

'No, he had no reason to believe he had.'

Mr Paget then walked all over the deck of the vessel. In the stern there was still piled up the roll of rope on which John had mounted to his fate; but the clergyman paid no particular attention to it, and wondered more and more how the accident happened.

A week later Dr Benson called at the rectory. He had returned from abroad, and now told the rector all the circumstances he was acquainted with.

‘It was quite by accident,’ he said, ‘I recognised him. He kept himself aloof from the other passengers, and he seemed by no means at his ease with me. Do you know, Mr Paget, he always had a sort of antipathy to me—why, I can’t say—but it has always been so. When I first met him years ago, that day I came as a *locum* to my predecessor, I distinctly remember how startled he was to see me. A few years later he practically refused to sell me his practice, and when he came down to that operation at Scrope Hall last summer, the curious way in which he received me was remarked by Mr Freshfield, his companion. Yes, he was a strange man, and apt to give you the idea he was eccentric—but what a splendid surgeon! It will be a long while before the world finds his equal.’

‘You didn’t see him on deck?’ asked Mr Paget.

‘No. We conversed for a short time, then he evidently wanted to get rid of me—at least, I thought so—said he wanted to lie down. I watched him go to his berth at the far end of the saloon, then I went to mine, and soon fell asleep. There were two young men who saw him leave the saloon, and one told me the baronet had a wild and startled look, and walked unsteadily, and that he stumbled at the foot of the stairs. But of course this might have been due to the motion of the boat.’

‘Well,’ replied Mr Paget, ‘this mystery, it seems, is not to be explained. How Sir John Armstrong died can never be known, as no human eye witnessed his end.’

After Dr Benson had gone, the clergyman fell into a reverie.

His forebodings in the case of Sir John Armstrong had come to pass in a way he little reckoned on. But there was a mystery he could not understand.

Had the unhappy man been guilty of self-murder ?

It was strange that visit of his to Fritton ; the seeking out of Mary Elliot's grave ; then the confession to Mary's sister, to be followed so soon by the seeming accident.

The more he thought the more perplexed he became ; but of one thing he was resolved, that come what might, he would breathe to no human soul his doubt.

Then came a pleasanter train of thoughts. Edith was free, and might possibly be his some day. God might yet bless him with the dearest wish of his whole life.

What a paradise the rectory would be with Edith for its mistress !

The old order was changing, giving place to new, in which there might yet be happiness both for Edith and himself, when time had softened, and in a measure toned down the discord of the past.

CHAPTER XXI

A VISIT TO FRITTON RECTORY

'I cannot give thee what is mine no more,
I cannot love again, as once of yore,
But what is mine to give is freely thine.'

FOR several weeks Edith was seriously ill. A species of brain fever was induced by this shock, and convalescence only slowly re-established.

Christmas had gone by, and another year begun before she was able to busy herself once more with the affairs of life.

John's body was never found, although every effort was made to recover it, and his last resting place will never be known, till that day when the sea shall give up its dead.

When health was fairly restored, Edith determined to leave London, and to live with her father at the old house in Norwich.

'I have little to bind me to London now,' she said to Mr Paget on one occasion, when he had called, after her recovery; 'my chief unhappiness has been associated with London, and my only happy days have been those I have passed away from it.'

Shortly afterwards Edith went to Norwich. The house in Cavendish Square was sold, and the name of the great surgeon disappeared from the chief centre of London professional life.

There were several obituary notices dealing with Sir John Armstrong's life. All were unanimous in the opinions they expressed of his great attainments, and lamented his premature loss.

The details of his life were dealt with from the successful operation, when house surgeon at the Norwich Hospital, to the famous achievements of more recent years.

Considerable importance was attributed to the seizure at St Barnabas.

'It is to be feared,' said the writer of the notice in the *Scalpel*, 'that Sir John Armstrong may have suffered from a similar attack on that fatal night on the steamboat, and may have been in a dangerous position at the time. This seems to be a not unlikely explanation of the catastrophe, and if this conjecture be correct, it affords another illustration of the dangers that may be incurred by epileptics, who put themselves in situations of peril.'

Mr Paget, when this notice came under his observation, considered carefully the suggestion.

'It may have been so,' he said, and in his heart he hoped it had been; for it seemed to lift from John's memory a great weight of moral guilt.

But he could not shut out from his mind what he had seen on the deck of the steamer, and his conversation with the officers; in the light of this it was difficult to picture Sir John Armstrong getting into any position in which an accident of the kind would be possible.

A subscription was made to perpetuate John's memory at St Barnabas, and large sums were given by aristocratic patients of former years. Conspicuous among whom, for the amount of his donation, was Sir James Scrope.

So the world went on as before. A new surgeon was appointed at St Barnabas, and Charley Dawson continued to make way in his profession, watching with

his faithful helpmate, Alice, his children growing up to take their place in the world.

Edith in the quiet of Norwich, with all her care devoted to her father, tried to forget the sadness of her former life. While the mortal remains of him to whom these pages have been chiefly devoted, lay many fathoms deep, hidden evermore from the eyes of men.

Requiescat in pace! Who shall dare to mete out to him his personal responsibility, but the great Judge of all? Who shall say what free will John really had in the moulding of his own sad life, or how far it may have been shaped for him generations before his birth?

That he always had dormant hereditary disease there could be little doubt; but that under all circumstances that disease was bound to develop and wreck his life, is by no means so certain.

The teaching of science every day more and more confirms this, that although disease, physical or mental, may be born in us, by proper training and care it may be held in check, and the individual go through a healthy life without let or hindrance therefrom.

Although 'The sins of the fathers' may be 'visited on the children,' the latter are allowed a means of escaping from their hereditary curse, and out of their own inherent good to create an ark of refuge for themselves.

No doubt it will be said, Who is to detect this disease? How shall we know of its presence? Forewarned is forearmed! If we are not aware of its presence, how are we to take precautions against its ravages?

Reader, for your own sake assume that you inherit the evil tendencies of a long succession of ancestors. The blood that flows in your veins has come from progenitors of the most diverse character. Could you see them all, what a shock it might be! What a

terrible outrage on your feelings could you look into the recesses of the mind of a remote ancestor!

Take it for granted there is always evil, moral or physical, to be fought against and overcome; that the laws of health cannot be set aside with impunity, and that by so doing, you may give a fatal advantage to disease born in you, which, better advised, you might have controlled. You should never forget it is the evil that must be looked to, that the good will look after itself; or more correctly, that by resisting the former, you cannot fail to nourish and develop the latter.

Life went along smoothly enough for Edith now. Her health had returned, but she was changed. She was more womanly, if anything, than before, but she felt a certain sadness and reserve in her most joyous moments, as if conscious of the sorrows she had gone through.

She made it her first duty to attend to her father; but happily his health had much improved, so that she had considerable time to devote to those good objects that had been pointed out by Mr Paget.

In some of the poorest parts of Norwich she was a very angel of God, carrying love and charity wherever she went.

By her husband she had been left in full control of large means, so that she was able to play the Lady Bountiful in a material manner.

If in the winter a soup kitchen was to be started; if a poor widow required assistance, or orphans were to be fed; if a small provision were wanted to keep a respectable, but unfortunate tradesman from the poorhouse, Edith was always in request: it being well known she never turned a deaf ear, when asked to help in any worthy enterprise.

She personally assisted, too, in extending the higher

education of her poorer sisters, and was able to supervise with considerable success a large night-school. As her experience in work of this kind was not great, she found Mr Paget's help valuable. He could always point out her mistakes, and show how success might be attained under the most unpromising circumstances.

Edith and Mr Paget were thus thrown a good deal together, and the latter watching her patience and self-denial, her success with her pupils, and the pleasure so invariably manifested at her presence by those among whom she worked, became if anything more madly in love than before, and wondered whether a time would come, when he might dare to ask her to spend the evening of life with him.

Dr Dawson was well pleased with the intimacy of the two. He had always liked the clergyman, and it occurred to him, as a by no means undesirable contingency, that Edith might become the mistress of Fritton Rectory.

He had even on one occasion vaguely hinted at it, by an allusion to the possibility of Edith marrying again ; but had been discouraged by the way in which his daughter received the suggestion, so that he had decided it would be better to leave her to be guided by her own feelings.

One day about two years after John's death, Mr Paget sought an interview with Dr Dawson.

'I love your daughter dearly, doctor,' he said, 'and I should esteem it an inestimable blessing to make her my wife. Have I your approval? Would you be willing to accept me as a son?'

Dr Dawson pressed his hand. 'Nothing I should like better, James. To no man would I more willingly trust Edith.'

Both, however, agreed that the time was scarcely ripe,

and that it would be better to wait rather than be precipitate.

In the summer of the following year, a patient of Dr Dawson's, who resided at Fritton, requested his old doctor as a special favour to come and see his wife, who was suffering from disease of an obscure character.

Dr Dawson was able to get about a little in the summer, and having been under an obligation to the applicant in the past, was desirous of acceding to his request.

So it was arranged, that on a certain day in July, he should make the visit accompanied by his daughter. He had further been induced by Mr Paget to have tea at the rectory afterwards, and in fact to stay till the next morning.

Edith had not in the least demurred to the arrangement, and Mr Paget felt that a crisis was approaching.

It was a lovely afternoon when Edith and her father arrived at Fritton Station.

They were met by the rector with a fly, and driven to the house of the patient. Mr Paget and Edith then drove on to the rectory, and it was arranged the fly should be sent back half-an-hour later, to fetch the doctor.

As they drove down a lane leading to the road that passed the rectory, Emily Burrows went by. She curtied to the rector and Edith, and the latter seemed to recall her face.

'Surely I have seen her before?' she remarked to her companion.

'Yes,' answered the other smiling, 'that was Emily Elliot, that used to be—the nurse in the old days at the Norwich Hospital. Your father must remember her well.'

'Poor thing,' said Edith sympathetically, 'then it was her sister who was drowned. She has had her share of trouble.'

A shade of uneasiness passed over Mr Paget's face. It were better that these two should not come together, and exchange their mutual knowledge. He thought he could rely on Emily, but what a terrible re-opening of the past it might be to Edith !

They were now at the rectory, and giving directions to the fly driver to fetch Dr Dawson at the proper time, Mr Paget led Edith into his domain.

She was very pleased with the old house and garden, and thought its aspect quiet and beautiful, with the old Norman church lying just behind.

The house was covered with green from the ground to the roof, and over the porch roses and clematis had been tastefully trained. The garden was old-fashioned, with all the familiar flowers, a good lawn, and fine old trees.

'I think,' said the clergyman after Edith had rested for a short time, 'you might like to look over my school. The mistress, I'm sure, will be pleased to show it you.'

Edith expressed her pleasure, so the two strolled together a few hundred yards down the road, to where the school was situated.

Mr Paget introduced Edith to the mistress, and being told a parishioner close by was in need of him, he left her in the latter's charge, promising to return.

Miss Wallis, the school-mistress, showed Edith all over the institution, pointing out the promising pupils, and telling how the school had grown under the rector's skilful management—that it was now one of the chief village church-schools in the county.

She then introduced her to the under-mistress, who exclaimed, 'Yes, Lady Armstrong, we have often heard of you, and your praise is a great compliment.'

Edith had been expressing approval of what she saw, but she looked inquiringly at the speaker as she made this remark.

'The rector,' continued the latter, 'is never tired of talking about you, and what you have done in your school at Norwich.'

Edith blushed slightly, and at the same moment Mr Paget returned, and nothing further was said.

When they got back to the rectory, Dr Dawson was there, and the three sat down to tea, forming quite a family party. Mr Paget could not help feeling what a change Edith's presence made. It did not seem like the old familiar room in which he took his solitary meals.

There was Evening Service, but the doctor expressed himself tired by the unusual exertion of the day, and remained at the rectory. Edith, however, accompanied Mr Paget to church.

As they walked through the churchyard the clergyman caught sight of a little Church Service Edith was carrying.

'I think,' he said gravely, 'I remember that book.'

'Yes,' answered the other, blushing, 'you gave it me many years ago, and then you promised to be a true friend. You have indeed kept your promise.'

Other words were on Mr Paget's lips, but at this moment they entered the church.

There was a sense of thankfulness, and a joyous tone in the Rev. James Paget's voice, as he said the Evening Service, and the congregation wondered a little at his lightheartedness.

It is true the congregation was not large, but the church was far from empty.

Edith, as she sat in the rector's pew, thought of another Evening Service many years before. Not in the summer time that, with the setting sun peacefully throwing his declining rays through the western windows, but in gloomy winter, when the huge proportions of St Nicholas, Great Yarmouth, were dimly lit up by a few gas branches.

Then she was, as it were, beginning life, and there was one by her side who was everything to her, and in whom her future seemed bound up. How little she thought then that life could be as bitter as it afterwards proved!

She was fortunately ignorant then of the troubles in store, and her dream had been of happiness, not of sorrow.

Now John was dead, but she still lived on, and had yet other duties to perform.

It was very peaceful that evening in Fritton Church, in spite of the small congregation and humble choir. Edith had always loved a country life, and it had been a pang to her to leave Driffield.

She began to fancy that here was a spot she might take an interest in, that the rectory was a dear old place, and Mr Paget so kind. What if—but no, why should he ever care to marry her?

She listened with heightened interest when he ascended the pulpit, and in strong and eloquent language preached from the text, 'Darkness endureth but for the night, joy cometh in the morning,' and urged on his hearers, that it was the Christian's duty not to be overcast by misfortune nor to give way to despair, however great the burden of sorrow might be. 'It is your duty,' he said, 'to strive after happiness in this world if it may be righteously yours. There is a great law of compensation ever present, always working. Those who to-day are oppressed by grief, to-morrow may rejoice.'

Then after a pause he continued, 'We all of us have our dreams,' and there was an emphasis on the first word. 'Who knows, but they may some day be realised? If not, as dreams they have been not without happiness, and we can never be the worse for them, be they pure and unsullied in their origin.'

That evening in the rectory garden James Paget

hazarded his fate, and asked Edith if she could sufficiently forget the past to be his wife.

'Lady Armstrong—Edith—' he murmured, 'I have always loved you, and may honestly tell you so now. You have never loved me; I know where your great love went. I know that it is not possible for such a love to be given twice, but none the less I ask you to be my wife. Your father wishes it, and I—I—think I could, indeed, make your life happier.'

They had been strolling along one of the garden paths, as the rector made this declaration.

Edith stood still a moment, and then with a slight tremor replied :—

'You are right, Mr Paget, I can never love again as once I did, and I would never marry you without telling you so. There is no one in the world I respect as much as you. Nay, love more than you,' she added, as she saw a shade cross his face, 'and if you can be content with what love is mine to bestow, then you are very welcome to it. No woman could wish for a worthier husband.'

Mr Paget clasped Edith in his arms and kissed her. He then led her into the rectory drawing-room, where they found Dr Dawson about to retire to rest.

'Doctor,' he said, leading Edith forward, 'your daughter has promised to be my wife. Won't you congratulate me?'

The old man's face beamed with satisfaction.

'I'm so pleased, Edith; you have been a good daughter, but James is quite worthy of you.'

But one scene more before we close this history.

It was the following Christmas day.

Edith, her father, and Mr Paget, are spending the holidays at Charley's house—not the old one that has been mentioned in past pages, but a much larger and

grander one. Charley has gone west, and is a leading London solicitor, and has invited the three to spend Christmas with him and his family, which now consists of three sons and three daughters.

Mr Paget has consented, on the understanding that all the party will spend the next Christmas at Fritton Rectory with himself and Edith, who is to become his wife in the spring.

Charley and James Paget are closeted together in the former's sanctum, and Charley is explaining to his friend the nature of John's settlement on Edith.

'It seems strange, Paget, old fellow, that you should now be about to marry my sister. I thought you were in love with her in the old days, when we were all young together, and so I suppose you were. Indeed, at one time it seemed to me likely you would get her before John came on the field, in spite of the poor mater's manœuvering.'

'Dawson,' replied the other, 'don't rake up the past. I feel unutterably sad when I think of your brother-in-law's wasted life.'

'Wasted life,' echoed Charley. 'Well, not altogether that. I don't know where we should be, if it had not been for John. He turned away ruin from our doors,' and grateful tears glistened in his eyes. 'You, too, Paget, will owe something to John. Your wife won't have a bad jointure. My father couldn't have given Edith what John has.'

'You mistake me,' sadly replied the other, 'I was not thinking of Sir John's worldly success, which was undoubtedly great. I used the term "wasted life," as applied to his own personal existence. Do you think his life was a happy one?'

Charley looked gloomy. 'To be sure,' he answered, 'he was strange at times. I couldn't always understand

him. I once thought he was in love with that post-office girl at Norwich years ago. Don't you remember Mary Elliot? He was terribly upset one afternoon at Driffeld, when the news of her suicide first appeared in the papers. His behaviour was so queer, that old Dr Armstrong was alarmed, and actually warned my father of a history of insanity in John's family, and gave him the option of withdrawing his consent to the marriage. Of course, my father laughed at him. Do you think he was really in love with this girl, and that she was false to him? You know there was fine scandal at the inquest.'

'God knows,' replied the other, 'what were John's relations with the poor girl of whom you speak, but oh be careful never to breathe a word in Edith's hearing! I fear those two were bound together by a chain which neither could break—a chain which hung as a fetter on John to the last hour of his life. Not only was his life wasted in this sense, but so also has been your sister's. What a life she must have led, feeling there was a secret between her and her husband, which raised an impermeable wall between them, a wall that even her love could never pierce. That secret she has never learnt, and—please God—she never shall! But what about the jointure you spoke of?'

'It is this, Paget: When drawing up John's will I advised him, as any solicitor would have done, to protect his widow from adventurers by making the money revert from her on marrying again. Of course, I didn't think of the possibility of her marrying you. He, however, called the arrangement unjust, and said that if Edith ever had another husband, as she had been his wife, he would not like her to go penniless, and so he refused to disendow her on re-marriage. Seeing how things have turned out I am glad he did so, for it would have made a considerable difference to you.'

'Dawson,' replied Mr Paget, 'it is your sister I want. I have enough and to spare, in my living at Fritton, and I should not have cared if Edith had had nothing ; but I am glad she will be provided for in event of my death. I always shrank from Sir John of late years, not so much because I loved his wife, as because I distrusted him, and felt sure he never valued Edith as she merited. I want none of his money. I wish you and your family had it all now, instead of having to wait for it.

At this moment their privacy was invaded.

Alice opened the door, and loudly upbraided them for keeping dinner waiting.

'It is too bad, Charley,' she said reproachfully, 'on Christmas day you can't say you've got important business. Didn't you hear the gong? I would have begun dinner without you, but Edith refuses to sit down till Mr Paget says grace.'

'There, Paget,' said Charley playfully, 'this time next year you will have a wife, who won't allow you to have a moment's peace, even on Christmas day. Then you'll be able to sympathise with me.'

THE END

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